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**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

**THESIS**

**A STUDY OF THE RUSSIAN ACQUISITION OF THE  
FRENCH *MISTRAL* AMPHIBIOUS ASSAULT WARSHIPS**

by

Patrick Thomas Baker

June 2011

Thesis Advisor:  
Second Reader:

Mikhail Tsypkin  
Douglas Porch

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**A STUDY OF THE RUSSIAN ACQUISITION OF THE FRENCH *MISTRAL*  
AMPHIBIOUS ASSAULT WARSHIPS**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS IN SECURITY STUDIES  
(EUROPE AND EURASIA)**

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**NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL  
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## **ABSTRACT**

In 2009, Moscow opened negotiations with Paris to purchase the Mistral class amphibious assault ship. In December 2010, Russia indicated that it was prepared to move forward with an agreement to buy two Mistral class warships, with the option of building two more jointly at a Russian shipyard. Neither Russia, nor the Soviet Union ever possessed a vessel with the capabilities of the Mistral class. An amphibious assault ship would be a new addition to the Soviet/Russian naval arsenal. The fact that Russia must turn to foreign suppliers to modernize its fleet capabilities indicates that Russia's domestic arms industry lacks the capability to produce a range of modern warships. The Mistral is the first significant arms sale of a major NATO power (France) to a country that some still see as a threat. For this reason, the sale has raised fears among the smaller NATO members, who charge that Paris has brushed aside their security concerns for national and economic reasons. This thesis argues that the Mistral sale is driven by Russia's need to acquire modern command and control and shipbuilding technologies, rather than increase its amphibious assault capabilities per se.



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## LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ACV	Air cushioned vehicle
AEW	Airborne early warning
ASW	Anti-submarine Warfare
BDK	Bolshoi Desantny Korabl or Large Landing Ship
BMP	<i>Boevaya Mashina Pekhoty</i> (Боевая Машина Пехоты) or Infantry Combat Vehicle
BPC	Bâtiment de Projection et de Commandement (Forward Deployment and Command Vessel)
CAST	Center for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies, Moscow based NGO
CODAD	Combined diesel and diesel – 2 engines powering one propeller
CODAGE	Combined diesel and gas turbine powerplant powering a generator which powers electric motors
DCN	Direction des Constructions Navales
DCNS	The resulting company of the merger of Direction Technique des Constructions Navales and the Direction des Constructions Navales
GVP	Russian State Armaments Program
ITAR	US International Traffic in Arms Regulations
LCAC	Landing craft air cushioned
LCM	Medium landing craft
LCU	Utility landing craft
LHA	Landing Helicopter Assault
LHD	Landing Helicopter Dock
LPD	Amphibious transport docks
LPH	Landing Platform Helicopter
LS	Landing Ship
LSD	Dock landing ship
LST	Landing Ship Tank
MBT	Main Battle Tank
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NEO	NonCombatant Evacuation Operations



NGO	Non Governmental Organization
NSS	National Security Strategy
OPK	United Industrial Corporation
OSK	United Shipbuilding Corporation (Russian Объединенная судостроительная корпорация)
SAR	Search and Rescue
SDK	Srednyy Desantnyy Korabl or Medium Landing Ship
Sevmash	<i>Severnoye Mashinostroitelnoye Predpriyatie</i> or Northern Machine–Building Enterprise
SS	The U.S. Navy’s hull classification for an attack submarine. Submersible Ship.
SSBN	The U.S. Navy’s hull classification for a strategic ballistic missile submarine. Submersible Ship, Ballistic missile, Nuclear powered.
SSN	The U.S. Navy’s hull classification for an attack submarine, nuclear powered. Submersible Ship, Nuclear Powered
UDK	Universal Landing Ship
VPK	Russian Defense industrial Complex

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This thesis examines Russia's decision to acquire the *Mistral* class LHD (Landing Helicopter Dock) warships from France. This purchase marks a departure for the Russian Navy that to date has only briefly counted ASW (Anti Submarine Warfare) helicopter carriers in its inventory. Russia's amphibious warfare fleet is primarily built around LST (Landing Ship Tank) style vessels that lack an over the horizon amphibious assault capability. The purchase of up to four *Mistrals* would be the first major foreign arms purchase by the USSR/Russia since World War II. The current agreement between Russia and France is for two *Mistrals* to be constructed in France, followed by two more *Mistrals* to be built in a Russian shipyard, likely in the St. Petersburg region. While as of May 2011 price and contract specifics are still being negotiated, it is likely the sale will still proceed.

The argument of this thesis is that Russia seeks to acquire the *Mistral's* up to date command and control systems and modern, modular French shipbuilding technologies rather than upgrade their amphibious assault capability. If capability were the driving force, the contract negotiations would surely have been concluded by now in the interest of faster construction timelines. The Russians see the *Mistral* as a way to help modernize their defense industry and navy. At present, no Russian shipyard can replicate the modular techniques used by the French to build a *Mistral*.

The fact that Russia originally identified the *Mistral* as its priority before announcing a need for a LHD capability means that the ship preceded the mission, which the Russians have struggled to define. While the principal attractiveness of the multi-mission *Mistral* to Moscow lies in the ship's technologies and construction techniques, a LHD style vessel also allows Russia to add large capital warships, which are ideal for soft power missions. There is little indication that Russia is seriously upgrading its ability to conduct an opposed amphibious landing. The *Mistral* breaks new ground because it marks the first major arms sale to Russia by a NATO member. The reactions by some of the smaller NATO members, the Baltic nations and Poland among them, have muted enthusiasm outside of France and Russia for a potential maritime game-changer on

Russia's maritime periphery. The Baltic states' inability to shake French determination to see the sale through has convinced them that their security concerns are trumped by economic considerations—in this case jobs for French workers. This has also caused many to question France's, and by extension NATO's, commitment to its Baltic partners in a showdown with Russia. In response to the apparently shifting strategic environment and questions about NATO resolve, the Baltic nations have approached some Scandinavian countries about possible defense pacts. In true Gallic fashion, Paris argues the illogicality of calling Russia a strategic partner, while refusing to sell it arms. France has also downplayed the new capabilities that the *Mistral* would bring to Russia. But the lack of pre-sale consultation coupled with Paris' apparent lack of concern for legitimate security implications of the sale has left many in the Baltic region unhappy, despite NATO's new Strategic Concept unveiled at the 2010 Lisbon Summit that sought to reassure member nations of the alliance's commitment to common defense.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION

In August 2009, Russia opened official negotiations with France to purchase the *Mistral* class amphibious assault ship. Russia has purchased warships from foreign countries since Peter the Great ordered ships from Holland to create the Russian Navy. However, since World War II, Russia has always produced its own major warships. Now Moscow seems eager to acquire a 21,000 ton warship manufactured abroad. Why does Russia now need a helicopter carrying, amphibious assault warship which heretofore it never possessed, even during the era of the Soviet Union? Furthermore, why is Russia looking to the West, particularly France, for its purchase? What capability will four *Mistral* class vessels bring to the Russian Navy and how might they be employed? On Christmas Eve, 2010, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev telephoned French President Nicholas Sarkozy to confirm that Russia is going forward with plans to buy two French built *Mistrals* and discussing building two more in Russia under license.

### B. IMPORTANCE

There are at least two reasons why this sale is worth investigating. First, during the days of the Soviet Union, major Soviet warships were built in Soviet shipyards. The fact that the Russian Navy is seriously considering buying foreign warships suggests that it can no longer produce the equipment that its military needs. This potential sale might suggest serious research and development problems in the Russian defense industry. Have the Russian admirals decided to take their rubles elsewhere because they know they will not get what they need from their own suppliers?

A second reason this study is important concerns the potential mission of an amphibious assault warship? The Soviet Navy never had a warship such as the *Mistral*. Instead the Soviet Navy focused on smaller tank and dock landing ships, which were passed down to the Russian Navy. However, none have the capability or size of a *Mistral* class vessel. The addition of *Mistral* type vessels will potentially bring a power

projection capability to the Russian Navy. But why does it need one? And where might the Russian Navy be looking to project power? The answer to this question may indicate Moscow's strategic priorities.

Capability may indicate intention. However, the desire to project power does not mean that the Russian Navy can support and escort a *Mistral* class ship. Is Russia's Navy serious about becoming an international player on the high seas, or does this sale represent an operational upgrade without a clear strategic concept? The answer to these questions requires a preliminary analysis of Russian Navy capability gaps and whether the *Mistral* or another vessel would fill them. This analysis will give a solid indication of what improvements, if any, one can expect in the Russian Navy.

This thesis will also address the potential impact of Russian naval purchases on NATO cohesion. On the one side is France, a prominent NATO member, with a history of independence and a politically powerful armaments industry eager to sell major weapons systems to Russia. On the other side are the Baltic nations who are very concerned about the sale, as is Georgia, which aspires to NATO membership. Does NATO simply sweep aside the concerns of smaller, weaker members and potential members? Or will NATO cohesion be undermined by the interests of the French armaments industry and Paris' requirement to create domestic jobs? As NATO moves forward, what impact might sales of weapons systems such as the *Mistral* have on alliance solidarity and relevance?

### **C. PROBLEM AND HYPOTHESIS**

From the Russian perspective, there are a myriad of possible explanations behind their desire to complete this sale. The main research will focus on the balance between military and political drivers of this decision. The *Mistral* design was a contender for the Royal Australian Navy's tender for an amphibious assault ship, a competition won by a Spanish design.<sup>1</sup> Paris has shopped the *Mistral* to countries such as Saudi Arabia and

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<sup>1</sup> Nick Brown, "Spanish Designs are Australia's Choice for Warship Programmes," *International Defence Daily* (August 1, 2007).

Turkey<sup>2</sup>, but so far has found no takers. Obviously, a sale to Russia would both justify the French investment, enhance French diplomatic clout, and showcase the *Mistral's* capabilities.

Research will reveal that Russia is looking to acquire the *Mistral* for technological, political, and military reasons. The main driver in Russia's interest is acquisition of the technologies. This interest in technologies covers both the modern command and control systems found in the *Mistral* and those technologies that are required to build the *Mistral*. These new shipbuilding technologies will allow Russia to modernize its shipyards from their Soviet-era capabilities.

The political benefit follows from the fact that the purchase of these warships allows Russia to create discord among NATO allies. While Russia does not anticipate a NATO invasion, Moscow would miss no opportunity to sow discord within NATO by pitting the smaller members against larger European ones who put their own national interests above the collective concerns of the alliance. Finally, while a quest for enhanced military capabilities are not the main drivers of the sale, they offer an important side benefit. The *Mistral* would give a once proud Russian Navy four modern capital ships. These would add to the Russian Navy's existing capital ships inventory that include the heavy nuclear powered missile cruiser *Pyotr Veliky* (*Peter the Great*) and the heavy aircraft carrying cruiser *Admiral Kuznetsov*. The *Mistral* vessels are well adapted to a peacetime role of humanitarian disaster response and littoral military action rather than amphibious operations against a defended shoreline. The acquisition of corvettes, frigates and destroyers probably make the most sense from a purely military capability perspective. But a 7,000 ton destroyer cannot project power and show the flag as well as a 21,000 ton helicopter carrier with 16 helicopters.

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<sup>2</sup> Galrahn, "Wanted: Big Amphibious Ships," Information Dissemination, <http://www.informationdissemination.net/2009/11/wanted-big-amphibious-ships.html> (accessed November 25, 2010).



Moscow seems to care more about image than creating a balanced battle fleet. For example, in addition to the purchase of the *Mistral*, the navy looks to put one or two mothballed *Kirov* class battle cruisers (Project 1144) back in service.<sup>3</sup> These are all impressive capital ships, but all require escort ships to operate effectively in a combat environment. Because the emphasis is on the Russian Navy's image and not true combat capability, the *Mistral* would appear to fit nicely into the navy's plans of limited power projection. The addition of *Mistrals* into the Russian fleet also fits into the navy's plan of adding warships as quick as possible to replace outdated vessels. The Russian Navy is not critically in need of a helicopter platform such as a *Mistral*. The *Mistral* though gives the ability for the Russian Navy to gain advanced technology and modern building techniques. Mere capability is not the driving force behind the sale.

#### **D. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Many countries are becoming interested in aviation capable amphibious warships. One main reason is that the idea of the World War Two style assault from waves of landing craft may no longer make sense against defended positions.<sup>4</sup> To get around this problem, many navies have shifted to the idea of rapidly transporting troops ashore via assault helicopters. Besides the United States, which is the clear leader in both numbers and types of amphibious assault warships, England, France, Spain, Australia, Canada, South Korea, Japan, Brazil, India, the Netherlands, Italy, Singapore, Greece, Indonesia and China all possess or are in the process of acquiring amphibious assault warships.

Amphibious warships can be used for far more than simply assaulting enemy beaches, however. An amphibious warship can also be used to project power, provide military support or medical relief inland from the sea, all without the use of formal ports, beaching sites or airfields.<sup>5</sup> Military operations are not the exclusive domain of

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<sup>3</sup> At 28,000 tons, the nuclear-powered heavy missile cruiser (also referred to as *battlecruiser* by the West) *Kirov* class was the largest non aircraft carrier or amphibious assault ships constructed since the end of World War II. Russia currently has only one, the *Peter the Great*, in operational service. "Russia Plans to Upgrade 3 Nuclear-Powered Cruisers by 2020 (Update 1)," *RIA Novosti*, August 25, 2010.

<sup>4</sup> Massimo Annati, "Amphibious Flat-Decks: Multi-Purpose Ships for Expeditionary Operations," *Naval Forces* 4, no. 28 (2007), 49.

<sup>5</sup> Tim Fish, "Amphibious Assault Ships: Striking Distance," *Jane's Defence Weekly* (June 15, 2010).

amphibious assault warships: perhaps one of the best examples of their civilian use was for humanitarian relief, seen in Haiti after the January 2010 earthquake or tsunami relief of Indonesia in 2005.<sup>6</sup> Another use has been to evacuate civilians from crises erupting in foreign countries, as shown by the French use of the *Mistral* (L-9013) during the evacuation of European civilians from Beirut and Larnaca in 2006.<sup>7</sup>

Simply grouping all amphibious assault vessels under one title is incorrect, however. To compare accurately different vessels of various navies, it is important to distinguish between distinct vessels and their exact roles. The Naval Institute Guide to Combat Fleets of the World defines amphibious warships in the following classes<sup>8</sup>:

LPH – Amphibious Warfare Helicopter Carrier - Major ships intended primarily to operate helicopters to transport embarked troops. In this overall classification, the U.S. Navy has the LPH (Landing Platform Helicopter), LHD (Landing Helicopter Dock) and LHA (Landing Helicopter Assault).

LPD – Amphibious transport docks or Landing Platform dock – These are major ships designed to carry and launch landing craft from a wet well deck at the stern.

LSD – Dock landing ship - Same primary role as a LPD but with the cargo being predominantly cargo vice troops.

LST – Tank Landing ship - Ships designed to beach and discharge cargo and troops via a bow ramp system.

LCU- Utility landing craft – Larger, generally open topped, bow ramp-equipped landing craft capable of transporting at least 100 metric tons of vehicles and personnel to a beach. Most LCU are not large enough to make extended ocean crossing, instead most can be transported inside a well deck of a large ship.

The U.S. Naval Institute classifies the *Mistral* as a LHD type vessel. The French though classify the *Mistral* as a “Bâtiment de Projection et de Commandement” (Forward

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6 Fish, “Amphibious Assault Ships: Striking Distance.”

7 Hartmut Manseck, “BPC “Mistral” Class,” *Naval Forces* 28, no. 1 (2007), 89.

8 Eric Wertheim, ed., *Naval Institute Guide to Combat Fleets of the World*, 15th ed. (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2007), xxiii.

Deployment and Command Vessel) or BPC type vessel, one that can perform the duties of a LHD but also has a significant command and control capability.



Figure 1. French *Mistral* Class LHD/BPC *Mistral* and *Tonnerre* underway (From Yannick Le Bris, shipshape.fr, 2006)

The Russian Navy or Soviet Navy, for that matter, never possessed any vessels of a LPH/LHD class. The only helicopter carriers the Soviet Navy ever operated were the Project 1123 *Kondor* class (*Moskva* and *Leningrad*). These vessels, while capable of carrying 14 helicopters and later Yak-38 FORGER vertical takeoff and landing aircraft, were designed and utilized in the role of “submarine chasers”, not for amphibious warfare.<sup>9</sup> These vessels are no longer in service and were sold in the late 1990s for scrap metal to India.

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<sup>9</sup> “Russian Navy Considers Acquisition of Mistral Class Assault Ship,” *ITAR-TASS*, August 4, 2010.



Figure 2. *Lenningrad* in service circa 1990 (From U.S. Navy)

The Soviets at one time had plans of their own LHA type, the Project 11780 LHA.<sup>10</sup> However, due to economic decline of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s, construction on these vessels never took place. Instead, what the Soviet Union passed down to Russia was a single class of LPDs, the *Ivan Rogov* (Project 1174) and the smaller *Alligator* (Project 1171) LSTs and *Ropucha* class LSTs (Project 775/775M).

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<sup>10</sup> Mikhail Barabanov, "Global Market of Advanced Large Assault Landing Ships," *New Defence Order Strategy* September, no. 04 (2010).



Figure 3. The *Moskva* awaiting scrapping in Alang, India<sup>11</sup>



Figure 4. LPD *Ivan Rogov* underway (From U.S. Navy, 2010)

These vessels are designed primarily to assault a beachhead in one of two ways. One method is the LPD/LSTs can offload troops in smaller landing craft or air cushioned landing craft who then assault the beach. The other method is for the LPD/LST to drive directly up onto the beach and offload troops via a bow ramp. The *Ivan Rogov* class is

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<sup>11</sup> Bob Henneman, "Shipbreaking Photo Gallery," All The World's Battlecruisers / The World's Last Pre-Dreadnoughts, 2011. <http://www.bobhenneman.info/Breakers5.htm>

the sole Russian amphibious warship design capable of operating and supporting helicopters. However, they only have room for four medium size helicopters. A *Mistral* style LHD has far more aviation capabilities than anything currently serving in the Russian Navy besides the *Admiral Kuznetsov*. For simple comparison, the *Mistral* can carry a total of 16 helicopters with six on its flight deck at any one time.<sup>12</sup>

Only one of three *Ivan Rogov* class vessel remains in service today after the first two ships were put up for auction in 1999,<sup>13</sup> and the third vessel, the *Mitrophan Moskalenko*, has never participated in a single exercise.<sup>14</sup> Even with the *Rogovs*, Russia has never had a vessel with the capabilities of a *Mistral*.

There are a few major ongoing debates concerning the sale of the *Mistral* warships, the first inside Russia itself over whether the Russian Navy has a need for such a warship? The main argument against the sale is that the Russian Navy has a severe shortage of ships in all classes, so it makes no sense to kick start modernization with an amphibious warship. Ruslan Pukhov, Director of the Centre of Analysis of Strategies and Technologies (CAST)<sup>15</sup> located in Moscow, expresses a view held by many that the estimated one to two billion euros that the *Mistrals* may cost could be better spent financing the construction of corvettes, frigates and destroyers, which the Russian Navy desperately needs.<sup>16</sup> Mikhail Barabanov called the potential purchase as “complete madness”, especially because the navy cannot afford to keep its current ships in good working condition or pay its officers.<sup>17</sup>

Another common argument against the sale is that the *Mistral* is basically unarmed and would need a heavy escort to operate in a combat environment. Col. Gen.

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12 Manseck, *BPC “Mistral” Class*, 89.

13 Tim Fish, “Russia Auctions Amphibious Dock Ships,” *Jane's Navy International*, March 5, 2009.

14 Barabanov, *Global Market of Advanced Large Assault Landing Ships*, 23.

15 Ruslan Pukhov is the director of the Center for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies, a Moscow based, private think tank specializing in Russian military affairs.

16 Roger N. McDermott, “Mistral Purchase Disguises Weak Condition of the Black Sea Fleet,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 7, no. 46 (March 9, 2010).

17 “Analyst: Russia's Planned Purchase of French Warship 'Insane Scheme',” *Interfax-AVN*, August 6, 2009.

Leonid Ivashov, the President of the Academy of Geopolitical Affairs, has stated that there is no reason for the Russian Navy to acquire a ship that is simply a “cruise vessel rather than a warship.”<sup>18</sup> The idea of a lightly armed warship contradicts the basic Soviet/Russian warship design idea of heavily armed warships which have a significant self defense capability. This can be seen in the *Admiral Kuznetsov*’s armament, which in addition to fixed wing aircraft, also carries multiple long range anti-air and anti-ship missiles systems.

Some former Russian Navy admirals insist that there is no Russian mission requirement for a ship of this type. This includes a former Black Sea Fleet Commander, Admiral Vladimir Komoyedov, who has called the *Mistral* a “tin can” and a “washtub” and opposes the purchase as there are not enough Russian warships to escort such a very lightly armed vessel.<sup>19</sup> Admiral Valentin Selivanov, former chief of the Main Staff and deputy Commander in Chief of the Navy, has questioned the rationale for an expeditionary warfare vessel when Russia has no overseas colonies or interests to protect.<sup>20</sup> He believes that the Russian Navy should build warships required for a blue water navy, such as missile cruisers, aircraft carriers and destroyers, instead of focusing on warships to control and affect the littoral regions. Additionally, since Russia already constructed the *Ivan Rogov* class warships and can still currently construct nuclear submarines, it has proven that it does not need to buy from abroad.<sup>21</sup>

On the opposing side of the debate features prominent figures in the Russian Ministry of Defense and Navy. The Commander in Chief of the Russian Navy, Admiral Vladimir Vysotskiy, argues that a *Mistral* style vessel fits into the current Russian military focus on a smaller, more mobile force that needs the capability to redeploy

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18 “Mistral Helicopter Vessel Inadequate for Tasks Carried Out by Russian Navy - Expert,” *Interfax*, November 30, 2009.

19 Mikhail Ryabov and Vitaliy Akimov, “Admiral Komoyedov Answered Questions from Readers of RIA Novyy Region,” *Novyy Region*, July 13, 2010.

20 “Russia: Former Admiral Says Medvedev 'does Not Know' Navy's Real Condition,” *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, December 1, 2009.

21 Ibid.

quickly. In September 2009, Admiral Vysotskiy referring to the conflict with Georgia, made the following statement:

For example, in the August conflict of last year a ship like that [referring to the *Mistral*] would have allowed the Black Sea Fleet to accomplish its missions in 40 minutes, not 26 hours, which was how long it took us.<sup>22</sup>

Vysotskiy and Russian Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov believe that a *Mistral* would give the Russian Navy mobility with a platform that could fulfill the roles of a helicopter carrier, landing ship, mobile hospital, and command center among others.<sup>23</sup> Defense Minister Serdyukov has also stated that since the Russian domestic industry cannot produce a vessel of this type and is “...lagging behind very much in certain areas...” compared to the West, Russia is forced to purchase certain types of military products abroad.<sup>24</sup> This is in the same theme echoed by Russian President Medvedev, who has chastised the Russian industry for its “backwardness, its inability to innovate and produce modern equipment to rearm the Russian military”.<sup>25</sup>

The scathing commentary of the Russian defense industry is not limited to Russian leaders only, however. Western experts too have argued that the demise of the Russian shipbuilding industry is why the Russian Navy is facing an “irreversible collapse” because it can no longer produce warships either in quantity or with the quality levels required by the navy, according to Admiral Vysotskiy.<sup>26</sup> These individuals simply point at the fact that only four new warships have been delivered to the Russian Navy between 2000 and 2009.<sup>27</sup>

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22 “Navy C-in-C Vysotskiy Says Russia in Talks to Buy French Warship,” *Interfax-AVN*, September 11, 2009.

23 Sergey Buntman and Anatoliy Yermolin, “Russia: CINC Vysotskiy Interviewed on Ekho Moscow Military Council Program,” *Ekho Moskvyy Online*, July 24, 2010.

24 “Russia Plans to Build Helicopters Carriers in Future,” *Interfax-AVN*, March 9, 2010.

25 Pavel Felgenhauer, “Medvedev Scolds Defense Industry and Pledges Huge Spending,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 7, no. 171 (September 23, 2010).

26 “Chapter Four: Russia,” *The Military Balance* 110, no. 1 (2010), 211.

27 Mikhail Tsyarkin, “The Challenge of Understanding the Russian Navy,” in *The Russian Military Today and Tomorrow: Essays in Memory of Mary Fitzgerald*, eds. Stephen J. Blank and Richard Weitz (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2010), 349.



Roman Trotsenko, President of the United Shipbuilding Corporation (OSK)<sup>28</sup> and First Deputy Defense Minister Igor Sechin counter that the OSK could build a *Mistral* type warship within the timeframe and the budget required by the Defense Ministry.<sup>29</sup> It simply needs to be directed to do so.<sup>30</sup>

Outside of Russia, there is great disagreement as to what the actual impact of the sale is. The French view point is that the *Mistral* negotiations are a sign of trust between Russia and France. As the French defense attaché in Russia states, France wants "...to turn over the Cold War page."<sup>31</sup> The French Prime Minister, Francois Fillion, has stated that "Russia should be treated like a partner" and therefore, it is a signal of trust to engage it in potential arms sales.<sup>32</sup> Meanwhile the Baltic countries, along with Poland and Georgia, are particularly concerned over the sale of military equipment and technology to a country that they do not trust. Lithuanian Member of European Parliament Vytautas Landsbergis made the statement that France's potential sale of warships to Russia was "a flower on the grave of Europe's solidarity"<sup>33</sup> Both Lithuania and Latvia have called for the EU to approve all arms sales to third party countries.<sup>34</sup>

Analysts debate the benefits of the sale. Dr. Dmitry Gorenburg of the Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies does not believe that the sale represents a resurgent Russia, but rather that the *Mistral* will not significantly change the balance of

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28 The United Shipbuilding Corporation is a state owned open joint stock company in Russia which controls the majority of Russian shipbuilding and repair facilities. The OSK owns multiple large shipyards in St Petersburg, Severodvinsk, and Vladivostok. Some of the major shipyards are Severnoye Mashinostroitelnoye Predpriyatiye in Severodvinsk, Admiralteyskiye Verfi and Severnaya Verf in St. Petersburg, the Yantar Shipyard in Kaliningrad and the Far East Plant Zvezda Shipyard. These shipyards also build the majority of warships and submarines for the Russian Navy.

29 Dmitriy Belikov, "Russia: Shipbuilding Corp's Trotsenko Interviewed on Expansion, Diversification," *Kommersant Online*, September 30, 2010.

30 "Russia: United Shipbuilding Corporation can Build Mistral Helicopter Ship," *ITAR-TASS*, November 27, 2009.

31 "France Wants to Turn Over Cold War Page in Relations with Russia," *Interfax-AVN*, April 26, 2010.

32 "French PM on "Indispensable" Need to Treat Russia as a Partner," *AFP (Domestic Service)*, October 9, 2009.

33 "Lithuanian MEP Calls Mistral Deal 'a Flower on the Grave of Europe's Solidarity'," *Baltic News Service*, March 4, 2010.

34 Ibid.

power in the Baltic region. He also thinks it is better to try and cautiously integrate Russia into the West (by allowing them to purchase western military equipment) and not treat it as a potential enemy.<sup>35</sup>

The opposite view is taken by Swedish analyst Bo Pellnas who judges that the Russians are building a capability to attack any littoral region in the world with the purchase of *Mistral* style vessels.<sup>36</sup> David Smith, a Senior Fellow at the Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, agrees that providing *Mistral* vessels only rewards Russia for its aggression against Georgia and its continued violation of the peace treaty which was signed.<sup>37</sup> Stephen Blank of the Strategic Studies Institute sees the sale both as a breach in NATO solidarity potentially leading to a weakening of Article V defense considerations, as well as envisioning that *Mistral* style ships could be used in the Baltic and Black Sea regions to intimidate Russia's neighbors.<sup>38</sup>

Therefore, clear battle lines drawn on multiple, often overlapping, issues concerning this sale. A careful analysis of the facts throughout this thesis will allow the separation of the truth from the rhetoric.

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35 Dmitry Gorenburg, *A French Perspective*, Russian Military Reform, March 2, 2010. <http://russiamil.wordpress.com/2010/03/02/a-french-perspective/>.

36 Bo Pellnas, "Russian Power may Split EU," *SvD Online*, December 1, 2009.

37 David J. Smith, "French Ship Sale to Russia must be Blown Off Course," *24 Saati*, November 17, 2009. [http://georgiandaily.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=15654&Itemid=66](http://georgiandaily.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=15654&Itemid=66).

38 Stephen Blank, comment on Russian Military Reform (blog), *The Mistral Sale: No Reason to Panic*, February 11, 2010. <http://russiamil.wordpress.com/2010/02/11/the-mistral-sale-no-reason-to-panic/>.

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## II. RUSSIAN PLANNING AND REASONS BEHIND THE SELECTION OF THE MISTRAL

### A. INTRODUCTION

In late 2009, Russia officially opened negotiations with France over the purchase of up to four amphibious assault ships of the French Navy's *Mistral* class. As the Soviet Navy never had any comparable vessels, and because the *Mistral* would considerably enhance Russia's strategic reach in the Baltic and Black Seas, the potential acquisition of such vessels raised many questions.<sup>39</sup> This thesis will argue that the decision to purchase four warships from France was not the result of a detailed analysis of Russian naval needs. Rather, the *Mistral* was desired by Moscow for other reasons. The benefits of gaining new construction knowledge as well as getting new ships rapidly, without disrupting existing production, factored heavily into the request. The selection of a LHD vessel seems to indicate that Russia may be looking at multirole platforms, moving away from single purpose anti-submarine or anti-surface warships built during the Soviet era. Amphibious assault capability was not the driving force behind the selection of an LHD, however. Rather, the Russian Navy is looking to expand capability to carry out various "soft power" missions. Russia is not looking for assault capabilities, but technological transfer, shipbuilding knowledge, and to expand its peace ops capabilities. At the same time, however, the *Mistral* gives Russia considerable strategic reach in the region which has alarmed its neighbors.

### B. RUSSIAN PLANNING DOCUMENTS

In discussing the proper equipment for the Russian Navy, it is important to look at what missions are required of it. The Russian Government has published a variety of policy documents that lay out the official missions and tasks of the Russian Navy, beginning with the 2001 Maritime Doctrine, the 2009 Russian National Security Strategy

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<sup>39</sup> In some literature, the Russian Navy has identified their *Mistrals* as Project VRS-160 helicopter carrying carriers. But because the warships are better known by the lead vessel's name, *Mistral*, this paper will refer to the vessels as *Mistrals*. Also the western classifications (ex. LST, LHA, etc.) will be used vice Russian classifications for ships (ex. UDK, BDK, etc.)- Nikolay Khorunzhiy, "Russia: Ministry of Defense Will Probably Buy Helicopter Carriers from France," *Vremya Novostey Online*, October 21, 2010.

(NSS) through 2020, and the 2010 Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation. Unfortunately, these documents spell out neither the true roles which the Russian Navy will fulfill, nor capabilities required. The NSS is particularly vague on defense and does not clarify what kind of changes the military needs to make.<sup>40</sup> The military doctrine is also unhelpful, as there are contradictions between the strategic vision and what is currently happening in Russian military reforms. The military doctrine has been called more “a declaration on intent to the west than for use as a guide for internal consumption.”<sup>41</sup> The Russian armed forces have been undergoing reform since 2008, and yet they have so far failed to write new doctrine. Therefore, the Russian view is “the sections of the document [military doctrine] relating to the armed forces are therefore nothing more than a useless collection of words of wisdom.”<sup>42</sup> What has come from statements about defense reform is that Russia is trying to move toward highly mobile forces, which are designed to fight along its periphery rather than designed to fight NATO.<sup>43</sup> There have also been repeated statements from President Medvedev demanding the levels of new armaments in the armed forces should rise from the current level of 10 percent to 30 and 70 percent of the inventory in 2015 and 2020 respectively.<sup>44</sup> President Medvedev has also made general statements regarding modernization in speeches in 2008 and 2009. In both speeches he specifically mentions the fact that one key element in the Russian defense reform is equipping the Russian military with

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40 Sophia Dimitrakopoulou and Andrew Liaropoulos, “Russia's National Security Strategy to 2020: A Great Power in the Making?” *Caucasian Review of International Affairs* 4, no. 1 (winter, 2010), 35.

41 Olga Bozhyeva, “Antiwar Doctrine. Formally Belligerent Document has in Fact Only Underlined Russia's Weakness,” *Moskovskiy Komsomolets Online*, February 7, 2010.

42 Ibid.

43 Mikhail Tsypkin, “What's New in Russia's Military Doctrine?” RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, [www.rferl.org/articleprintview/1970150.html](http://www.rferl.org/articleprintview/1970150.html) (accessed February 27, 2010).

44 Russian Defense Policy, *Defense Ministry Claims More Money Needed for Armaments*. WordPress.com, June 6, 2010. <https://russiandefpolicy.wordpress.com/2010/06/04/defense-ministry-claims-more-money-needed-for-armaments/>.

modern, sophisticated weapon systems.<sup>45</sup> So Russia is moving toward smaller, more mobile forces equipped with new weapons.

### C. RUSSIAN STATE ARMAMENTS PROGRAM (GVP)

The Russian State Armaments program (GVP) is a long-range plan, which over a specified time period, will match budget to purchases. The Russians, however, lack a true planning system. Military planning and the GVP are often based on different principles, which lead to strategic confusion. There is no explicit annual defense budget request procedure. In addition, the GVP is discussed in secrecy.<sup>46</sup> For instance, Deputy Defense Minister Vera Chistova announced that "...funds needed to purchase French *Mistral* helicopter carriers..." were added to next year's (2011) draft defense budget, a sure indication that little forethought was given to the decision.<sup>47</sup> The fact that she mentioned both the country and the winning ship before the official winner of the tender<sup>48</sup> was announced by General Nikolai Makarov<sup>49</sup> or President Medvedev speaks volumes for the lack of a planning process, or a true assessment of naval needs and ways to acquire the desired capability. General Makarov announced on 14 December that a decision had been reached on purchasing a *Mistral* helicopter carrier from France,<sup>50</sup> which was no surprise as many felt the entire tender was for show and the result was likely predetermined. The fact that General Makarov made his announcement before

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45 In the 2008 speech, President Medvedev said "...of course we need an army which is equipped with sophisticated weapons...Fundamentally new, high technology weapons will play a particular role." – Dmitry Medvedev, "Opening Address at a Meeting with Commanders of Military Districts," President of Russia, Official Web Portal, [http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/text/speeches/2008/09/26/2019\\_type82912type84779\\_206970.shtml](http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/text/speeches/2008/09/26/2019_type82912type84779_206970.shtml) (accessed April 23, 2011). In 2009 President Medvedev stated "The third and most important challenge is to equip our troops with advanced weapons...In 2011 we will begin the large-scale rearmament of the army and navy." – Dmitry Medvedev, "Speech at an Extended Session of the Defence Ministry Board," President of Russia, Official Web Portal, [http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/text/speeches/2009/03/17/2037\\_type82913type84779\\_214073.shtml](http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/text/speeches/2009/03/17/2037_type82913type84779_214073.shtml) (accessed April 23, 2011).

46 Vasily Zatsëpin, "Performance-Oriented Defence Budgeting: A Russian Perspective," Gaidar Institute for Economic Policy, 2005. [www.iet.ru/files/persona/zatsepin/Brno2005.pdf](http://www.iet.ru/files/persona/zatsepin/Brno2005.pdf).

47 "Russian Draft Budget Earmarks Money for Mistral Deal," *Interfax*, October 26, 2010.

48 A tender was offered by Russia at the 2010 Euro-Naval convention for bids to build with Russia four amphibious assault ships.

49 General of the Army Nikolai Makarov is the current Chief of the Russian General Staff.

50 "Purchase of Mistral Helicopter Carriers from France Approved," *ITAR-TASS*, December 14, 2010.

President Medvedev telephoned French President Sarkozy on 24 December 2010; officially announcing that France had won the warship tender,<sup>51</sup> only furthers this suspicion.

There have been three prior GVP before the current one: GVP 1996–2005, GVP 2001–2010, and GVP 2007–2015. The only thing they have in common is that in each case the government failed to achieve its stated goals, in part perhaps because each was revised soon after its creation. These overlaps make it difficult to see what was actually bought or where money was spent.<sup>52</sup> Of note, the 2007–2015 GVP made no mention of an amphibious assault warship, or a helicopter carrier. So the desire to acquire the *Mistral* seems to have been an impulse buy. The 2007–2015 GVP was changed in midstream when Defense Minister Serdyukov initiated a reform of the Russian forces in the aftermath of the 2008 Georgian conflict. So the plans and concepts laid out in the GVP were quickly overtaken by events.<sup>53</sup> Serdyukov announced that the importation of two *Mistral* class warships were included in GPV 2011-2020. However, investments in the construction of similar ships in Russia are not included in the GPV.<sup>54</sup> Apparently, then, the stated goals of upgrading and modernizing the Russian shipbuilding industry were an afterthought. Moscow-based defense specialist Konstantin Makiyenko<sup>55</sup> believes that construction of the domestically produced warships will be decided after the first warship is built and tested.<sup>56</sup>

The French *Mistral* was laid down in July 2003, launched in October 2004, and commissioned in December 2006. The second vessel, the *Tonnerre*, took four years from the keel being laid to commissioning. So, with a three-year lay to launch window, the United Shipbuilding Corporation (OSK) schedule to begin construction of a domestically

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51 “France Wins Tender to Build Warships for Russia,” *RIA Novosti*, December 24, 2010.

52 Russian Defense Policy, “*More Popovkin on GPV 2011-2020.*” July 20, 2010.  
<http://russiandefpolicy.wordpress.com/2010/07/20/more-popovkin-on-gpv-2011-2020/>.

53 Ruslan Pukhov, “A Strange Undertaking,” *Izvestiya*, November 25, 2009.

54 “French Mistral Favorite in Russian Helicopter Ship Tender,” *Interfax-AVN*, October 28, 2010.

55 Konstantin Makiyenko is an expert of the Center for the Analysis of Strategies and Technologies (CAST), a Moscow based, private think tank specializing in Russian military affairs.

56 Aleksey Nikolskiy and Maksim Tovkaylo, “Russia to Sign Contract for Purchase of Mistral-Type Ship in First Half of 2011,” *Vedomosti Online*, January 25, 2011.

produced *Mistral* by 2014 seems wildly optimistic.<sup>57</sup> Russian Defense Ministry sources have said they expect the first *Mistral* to be delivered in “late 2013-early 2014 and the second in late 2014-early 2015.”<sup>58</sup> This is on par with the French built *Mistrals* building timelines. However, to imagine that the Russian *Mistrals* could be built faster than the French ones, especially since the Russian *Mistrals* will require some design modifications, is anchored more in fantasy than realistic assessment. The longer it takes the French to build the warships means more employment for French workers. So there seems to be little time for testing of the first warship. More realistically, if the OSK is to begin building warships by 2014, the GVP will have to be changed this year. The other potential outcome is that the Russian Navy waits, and accepts the fact that it will initially have minimal upgrades to its domestic shipyards, so that the third and fourth ship will be delivered after 2020. High placed sources in the Russian Navy’s main headquarter have indicated that the GVP will only include funds to purchase two French built *Mistrals*, and the Russian built *Mistrals* are not envisioned until after 2020.<sup>59</sup>

Ruslan Pukhov states that the *Mistral* sale represents all that is wrong in the Ministry of Defense as well as with the service chiefs in terms of a lack of clear cut views on long range prospects in the area of military technology planning. The inference from the latest GPV is that Russian planning remains subject to stop and starts, instability, and displays of *volyuntarizm*.<sup>60</sup> *Volyuntarizm* is a term Russians use to mean behavior subject to ill-considered changes, or changes made by people without consulting the experts. This is exactly the criticism of the *Mistral* sale, that plans keep getting changed and people who do not know better are the ones making the changes and choices.

#### **D. WHAT STARTED THE TREND TOWARD MISTRAL?**

In August 2009 when the Russians formally approached the French, inquiring about the purchase of multiple *Mistral* class warships, genuine surprise arose from the

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<sup>57</sup> Yelena Danilevich and L. Paleyeva, “Mistral from Kronshtad,” *Argumenty i Fakty Online*, January 26, 2011.

<sup>58</sup> “Russia, France Sign Warship Agreement,” *RIA-Novosti*, 2011.

<sup>59</sup> “Russia Will Not Build Mistral Helicopter Carriers before 2020,” *Interfax*, February 9, 2011.

<sup>60</sup> Pukhov, *A Strange Undertaking*. *Izvestiya*, November 25, 2009.



Russian defense industry and analysts. Immediately it was noted that there was no mention of a LHD style amphibious assault warship in the 2007–2015 GPV. The only amphibious warship that had been discussed in previous years was the *Ivan Gren* LST. This vessel was projected as a direct replacement for the *Alligator* class LST. The *Ivan Gren* is also considered a follow on improvement to the *Alligator*, as indicated by the Project number. The *Alligators* were classified as Project 1174 while the *Ivan Grens* are classified as Project 1174.1. The lead vessel had been laid down in 2004 and was expected in service in 2009, yet had disappeared from defense discussions and even the builder's website for a period of time.<sup>61</sup> It would be fair to say the idea of amphibious assault ships in general for the Russian Navy seemed to be on the back burner.

This thesis makes clear that there are a multitude of factors driving this sale. It also argues that an in depth analysis of Russian Navy mission requirements is not one of them.

## **1. Russian Defense Industry**

First, the Russian Armed Forces, and particularly the Navy, are tired of waiting for products from the Russian defense industry. The Russian Navy's newest nuclear attack submarine, the *Severodvinsk* SSN (Project 885), was under construction for 17 years at Sevmash in Severodvinsk before being delivered.<sup>62</sup> The Russian Army just canceled procurement of the T-95 MBT because it had been in development since the early 1990s and became obsolete before it would have been fielded.<sup>63</sup> The navy was also scheduled to receive its initial frigate of the *Admiral Gorshkov* class in 2009, with 20 in service by 2015. Instead, the first frigate will be ready in 2011; leaving considerable doubt the navy will have more than three or four by 2015.<sup>64</sup> Funding is no longer the

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61 Dmitry Gorenburg, *The Mistral Comes to Town*, Russian Military Reform, November 25, 2009. <http://russiamil.wordpress.com/2009/11/25/the-mistral-comes-to-town/>.

62 Mikhail Barabanov, "Russian Shipyards Review: Most Unable to Build Modern Ships, Need Modernization," *Kommersant Online*, October 25, 2010.

63 Christopher F. Foss, "Russian Army Abandons Development of T-95 MBT," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, <http://jmsa.janes.comlibproxy.nps.edu> (accessed September 10, 2010).

64 Dmitry Gorenburg, *The Future of the Russian Navy Part 2: Smaller Surface Ships*, Russian Military Reform, August 29, 2010. <https://russiamil.wordpress.com/2010/08/29/the-future-of-the-russian-navy-part-2-smaller-surface-ships/>.

issue as it was during the 1990s when there were no domestic orders. Although shipyards are now receiving defense money, projects lag behind schedule. This realization that nothing was going to change may have spurred the Navy to look to foreign shipyards. Deputy Director for Moscow's Institute for Political and Defense Analysis Aleksandr Franchikhin believes that the sale would pressure the Russian VPK (defense industrial complex) to produce better quality products, although he doubts the *Mistral* should be the tool of choice for this pressure.<sup>65</sup> However, the *Mistral* serves multiple needs. First, it signals to the VPK that the Russian military is no longer limited by domestic production capabilities and in general is displeased with the quality and timeliness of equipment procurement. Second, the *Mistral* (specifically the technology transfer) gives the Russian Navy the potential to construct future warships in a more modern and faster way. Finally, the purchase of four *Mistrals* upgrades the Russian fleet faster than waiting for domestically produced warships.

According to a 2009 report by the *Independent Military Review*, the Russian Navy faces collapse because the domestic shipbuilding industry can build neither the quantity nor quality of ships the navy needs. Within ten years, the report says, there will be less than fifty warships in the entire Russian Navy capable of operations.<sup>66</sup> With this dire prognosis, the navy does not need ships fifteen or twenty years from now – it needs ships now! The Russian Navy hopes that by buying abroad it can have warships enter service faster. This urgency to acquire new ships can be seen in other pursuits besides simply the *Mistral*. The Russian Navy has announced plans to complete the refurbishment of the *Admiral Nakhimov*, one of its three remaining *Kirov* class nuclear powered battle cruisers.<sup>67</sup> In addition, Russia is in talks with Ukraine about the possible procurement of a *Slava* class missile cruiser which has been sitting unfinished in Nikolayev, Ukraine for 20 years.<sup>68</sup> Ukraine says the ship is 95% complete, while Russia views it closer to 50%.

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65 Aleksandr Bushev and Sergy Ilchenko, "Who is the Real Master of the Black Sea Fleet," *Svobodnaya Pressa*, February 26, 2010.

66 Reuben F. Johnson, "The Fleet that has to Die the Russian Navy's Irreversible Collapse," *The Weekly Standard* (July 15, 2009).

67 *RIA Novosti*, "Russia Plans to Upgrade 3 Nuclear-Powered Cruisers by 2020 (Update 1)."

68 "Russia Waits for Kiev's Acceptable Decision on the Missile Cruiser Sale," *RIA Novosti*, [http://rusnavy.com/news/navy/index.php?ELEMENT\\_ID=11595](http://rusnavy.com/news/navy/index.php?ELEMENT_ID=11595)

Still Moscow estimates that it would take 1.7 billion rubles (60 million dollars) to bring it back into service.<sup>69</sup> Refurbishing older warships may still be faster (and cheaper) than waiting for a new warship to be constructed, especially since no new construction of missile cruisers is planned – above all no nuclear powered cruisers. The acquisitions of the *Mistral* fit as part of the Russian plan to rebuild their fleet quickly, with pure numbers trumping a true methodical modernization and refurbishment plan.

When it became public knowledge that the Russian Navy was interested in purchasing a series of amphibious assault ships, the OSK insisted that it could build a *Mistral* style warship to the same specifications, if not better, than the French version.<sup>70</sup> Claims arose from the Russian defense industry that they had both the capability and knowledge to build a modern helicopter carrier. They pointed to the Nevskoye Design Bureau’s design Project 11780 UDK, which was an LHA designed during the Soviet era with a displacement of 30,000-40,000 tons displacement. This design was even larger than the *Mistral* and, they claimed, more capable.

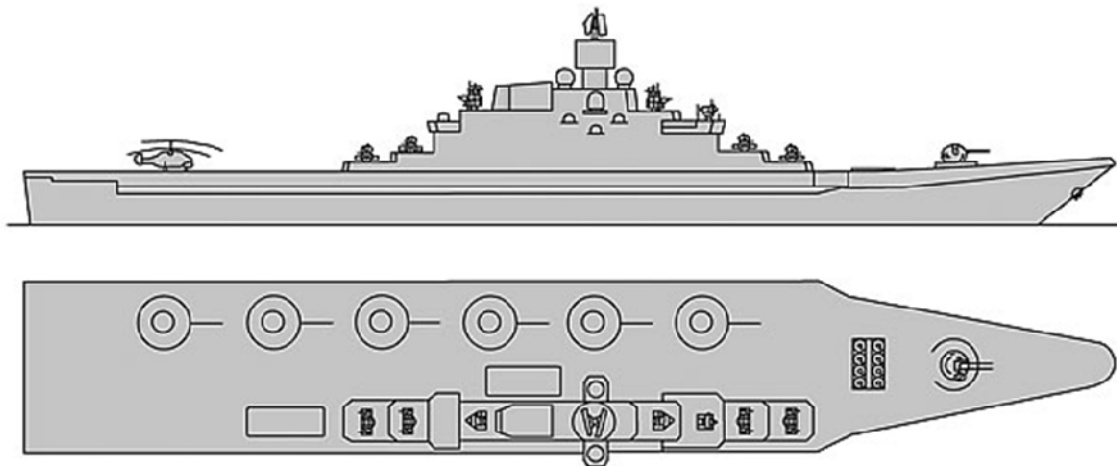


Figure 5. Line drawing of Project 11780<sup>71</sup>

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69 Russian Defense Policy, *Russia is Not Likely to Buy Ukraine*. WordPress.com, March 30, 2011. <http://russiandefpolicy.wordpress.com/2011/03/30/russia-not-likely-to-buy-ukraine/>.

70 ITAR-TASS, “Russia: United Shipbuilding Corporation can Build Mistral Helicopter Ship.”

71 Aleksandr Mozgovoi, “Turns of the Plotline. Projects by Russian Design Bureaus are Not Inferior to Foreign Ones,” *Natsionalnaya Oborona Online*, May 31, 2010.

The Project 11780 was designed to carry out the same functions as the U.S. *Tarawa* class LHA. The Soviet design was referred to as the “Ivan Tarava” because of its similarities in mission and design to the American LHA.<sup>72</sup> A lack of available building berths in the late 1980s was one of the reasons that construction on the class was never started, along with the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991.<sup>73</sup>



Figure 6. Model of the UDC Project 11780 (From strizhi.ru<sup>74</sup>)

The design knowledge probably still exists in Russia. The problem is that updating a design from the 1980s would take time and would require modifications. Most importantly, the experience in building a modern helicopter carrier is missing in Russia today.

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<sup>72</sup> Mozgovoi, “Turns of the Plotline. Projects by Russian Design Bureaus are Not Inferior to Foreign Ones.”

<sup>73</sup> Ilya Kramnik, “The Agony of Choice: Russia Looking for Best Amphibious Assault Ship,” *RIA-Novosti*, October 19, 2010.

<sup>74</sup> “История отечественных авианосцев в модельках,” Сайт общественной поддержки авиационной группы высшего пилотажа “Стрижи,” <http://pilot.strizhi.info/2008/04/09/5309#more-5309>.

## 2. Outdated Shipbuilding Facilities

At present, Russia could not replicate a French-built *Mistral*. The *Mistral* was built jointly by Direction des Constructions Navales (DCN) and Chantiers de l'Atlantique with construction taking place in shipyards in both Saint-Nazaire and Brest. The *Mistral* and her sister ships are built in a modular fashion. For the *Mistral* and the *Tonnerre*, the front portions of the ships were constructed in Saint-Nazaire before being transported to Brest for mating with the aft portion of the ship.



Figure 7. Mating of the forward and aft sections of the *Mistral* (From Yannick Le Bris, 2004)

This modular construction requires the use of extremely heavy cranes to lift several hundred-ton modules into place. For example, the Saint-Nazaire shipyard has a gantry crane that can lift 750-ton sections.<sup>75</sup> *Mistral* assembly also required a graving dock, as the front and back halves were floated together (as seen in Figure 7).

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<sup>75</sup> “Facts and Figures: Saint-Nazaire Shipyard,” STX Europe, <http://www.stxeurope.com/aboutus/localstxeuropesites/france/factsfigures/>.



Figure 8. Example of the modular construction of the *Mistral* BPCs. This is the 690 ton forward module being assembled for the third French BPC, the *Dixmude*. (From Bernard Biger, STX France, 2009)<sup>76</sup>

In contrast, Soviet era and Russian shipyards do not use modular techniques in building large warships. Rather warships were assembled piece by piece from the keel up. Another important consideration is that all the aviation ships were built for the Soviet Navy in the Nikolayev shipyard, which is in Ukraine.<sup>77</sup> In Table 1, the capabilities of the largest shipyards in Russia are presented for comparison:

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<sup>76</sup> “Saint-Nazaire: Le BPC Dixmude Reçoit Son Étrave Et Ses Moteurs,” Meret Marine, <http://www.meretmarine.com/article.cfm?id=113043>.

<sup>77</sup> The Nikolayev shipyard built the *Moskva* class helicopter carrier, *Kiev* class VSTOL carrier, the *Kuznetsov* carrier and had begun construction on the Soviet’s full size nuclear aircraft carrier, the *Ulyanovsk* before it was cancelled because of the USSR’s break up.

Table 1. Major Russian Shipyard Capabilities<sup>78</sup>

	Sevmash	Baltiysky Zavod	Admiralty Shipyards	Far East Plant Zvezda	Severnaya verf	Yantar	Amur Shipyard
Number of Slipways suitable for <i>Mistral</i>	3	2	2	0	0	0	0
Length / Width	302m x 44m	350m x 36m	259m x 35m	192 m x 32m	168 m x 20m	306m x 24m	200m x 23m
Max Crane weight	520 tons	80 tons	200 tons	100 tons	100 tons	80 tons	100 tons
Max Tonnage	unknown	100,000 tons	70,000 tons	unknown	12,000 ton	12,000 ton	unknown
The <i>Mistral's</i> length is 199 meters by 32 meters wide, and empty she weighs 17,000 tons							

In looking at the shipyard capabilities, only the physical capabilities and sizes will be considered. The ability of the shipyards to produce the necessary components is outside the scope of this examination. Of all the major Russian shipyards, only Sevmash comes close to having the physical capability to build the *Mistral* in a modular fashion. The problem is some of the largest sections of the *Mistral* weigh upwards of 690 tons (see Figure 8), exceeding current Russian shipyard crane capability. Russian shipyard crane capacity as a whole lags behind modern shipyard construction cranes throughout the world.<sup>79</sup> Either the *Mistral's* modular construction design would have to be modified for Sevmash's smaller cranes, or Sevmash itself would need new cranes. Neither option is ideal, because the Russians want to learn the French shipbuilding techniques, the most

<sup>78</sup> All data on Russian shipyard characteristics was obtained from the shipyards official websites: Sevmash at [www.sevmash.ru](http://www.sevmash.ru) / Baltiysky Zavod at [www.bz.ru](http://www.bz.ru) / Admiralty Shipyard at [www.admship.ru](http://www.admship.ru) / Far East Plant Zvezda at [www.fe-zvezda.ru](http://www.fe-zvezda.ru) / Severnaya Shipbuilding Plant at [www.nordsy.spb.ru](http://www.nordsy.spb.ru) / Yantar Shipyard at [www.shipyard-yantar.ru](http://www.shipyard-yantar.ru) / Amur Shipbuilding Plant at [www.amurshipyard.ru](http://www.amurshipyard.ru).

<sup>79</sup> As examples, the Northrop Grumman Corporation Newport News shipyard which builds the *Nimitz* and *Ford* class nuclear aircraft carriers has a 900 ton capacity crane, soon to be upgraded to an 1100 ton crane. The Navantia Fene-Ferrol Shipyard in Spain which builds the *Juan Carlos* LHD has a 800 ton capacity crane for assembly of modular portions of ships. "Northrop Grumman Corporation Newport News," Jane's Naval Construction and Retrofit Markets, <http://jdim.janes.com/JDIC/JDIM/home.do>, "Instalaciones: Astillero Fene-Ferrol," Navantia, [http://www.navantia.es/irj/portal/anonymous/AstFeneFerrol?guest\\_user=anonymous\\_en](http://www.navantia.es/irj/portal/anonymous/AstFeneFerrol?guest_user=anonymous_en).

effective and modern ones, not a compromise between advanced techniques and current capability of Russian yards. Waiting and delaying current orders to upgrade the shipyard is also less than ideal.

Sevmash does have experience with modular construction techniques. However it has primarily only built submarines, with its surface warship production ending in the late 1950s. It has more recently struggled with retrofitting the ex-*Admiral Gorshkov* aircraft carrier on schedule for the Indian Navy. In addition to its retrofit struggles, Sevmash has fallen behind on deadlines in construction the Prirazlomnaya oil platform for Gazprom, which was also built in a modular fashion.<sup>80</sup> Besides the crane issue, perhaps a more pressing reason that Russia looked away from Sevmash to build a *Mistral* is that, as the sole current producer of nuclear submarines for the Russian Navy, Sevmash is operating close to capacity. After launching the *Yuriy Dolgorukiy/Borei* SSBN (Project 955) in 2008, and the second ship of its class, the *Alexander Nevsky*, Sevmash still has two more *Borei* SSBN class under construction.<sup>81</sup> In addition to the *Borei* class, Sevmash just launched the lead vessel of the *Severodvinsk* class SSN (Project 855) and has a second *Severodvinsk* SSN under construction currently. Sevmash Director General Nikolaj Yakovlevich Kalistratov has stated that with the announced submarine building program, his yard will be operating at capacity until 2020.<sup>82</sup>

The Russian Navy needs both new surface ships and submarines. As the Sevmash shipyard is the primary producer of submarines for the Russian Navy, any massive shipyard upgrades for surface ship construction would impact the building of submarines. To delay submarine production in order to build a *Mistral* is not in the overall interest of the Russian Navy. Therefore, if the *Mistral*-class LHD is built in Russia, it probably will not be in Sevmash.

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80 Barabanov, *Russian Shipyards Review: Most Unable to Build Modern Ships, Need Modernization*, 3.

81 "Putin Congratulates New Submarine Crew on Start of Dockside Trials," *ITAR-TASS*, December 13, 2010.

82 "JSCO Sevmash," *International Resource Journal*, [http://www.internationalresourcejournal.com/resource\\_in\\_action/nov\\_dec\\_09/jSCO\\_sevmash.html](http://www.internationalresourcejournal.com/resource_in_action/nov_dec_09/jSCO_sevmash.html).



Unfortunately for Moscow, none of the other shipyards in Russia are capable of building a *Mistral* in a modular fashion. While the shipbuilding berths at the Baltiysky Zavod and Admiralty shipyards could handle a *Mistral*, they rely on keel up, piece by piece construction. The completed warship slides down a ramp into the water. This is an older, time-consuming method of shipbuilding. Neither shipyard has the crane capacity to support lifting and placing large modules in place. The Russian Navy seeks the capability to build a modular warship. The OSK wants the ability to build modular ships in the future, whether for civilian or military purposes. All of the Soviet era large warships, such as the *Kirov*, *Kiev*, and *Kuznetsov* classes, were all built piece by piece from the keel up. So a *Mistral* would not only be the first modular constructed warship in the Russian/Soviet Navy. It would also be the first warship with a podded propulsion system.<sup>83</sup> Clearly, it would be more efficient and quicker to have the French provide the necessary modular construction knowledge than for the Russians to figure it out themselves by trial and error.

Also, as with Sevmash, Russian shipbuilders have done a decent job in the last five years of utilizing all available building facilities. The Admiralty shipyard has launched for the Russian Navy the *Lada* or *Sankt-Peterbrug* SS (Project 677) diesel submarine, and is building two more of the *Lada* class as well.<sup>84</sup> Besides domestic *Lada* orders, Admiralty also just finished two Project 636M (Improved SS *Kilo* class) submarines for Algeria, has orders from Vietnam for six more 636M, potential sales to Venezuela and Indonesia and has received orders from the Russian Navy for three 636M.<sup>85</sup>

The Yantar shipyard is also backlogged with orders after nearly 20 years of not launching a new warship. Currently Yantar has orders to build three Project 121356M

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<sup>83</sup> The podded propulsion system, or azipod system, with pictures is explained later when discussing the *Mistral's* capabilities.

<sup>84</sup> Barabanov, *Russian Shipyards Review: Most Unable to Build Modern Ships, Need Modernization*.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

frigates, three frigates of the Project 11356M (*Talwar* Class) class for the Black Sea Fleet and six *Ivan Gren* Project 11711 LST, two of which are currently under construction.<sup>86</sup>

The Severnaya Verf shipyard by some accounts has one of the highest workloads in the shipbuilding industry today.<sup>87</sup> It is currently building two *Admiral Gorshkov* (Project 22350) frigates, an intelligence vessel of the Project 18280 class, and two *Stergushchiy* (Project 20380) corvettes.

This workload at the Admiralty, Yantar, and Severnya Verf shipyards is significant. These shipyards do not have the capacity to modernize significantly their facilities to construct a *Mistral*, all the while maintaining production of their current orders. In order to modernize, existing production would have to be curtailed. Again, this is opposite of the overall goal of the Russian Navy, which is to get as many ships as possible into the fleet quickly to replace aging warships. For the shipyards as well, the foreign orders are providing vital capital, so delaying foreign orders is counterproductive to the shipyards themselves.

The Amur shipyard, which concentrated on submarine construction, was never a major surface warship shipyard for the Soviet Navy. Today however, it has no orders from the Russian Navy after it completed the Project 971I SSN submarine. It is also in dire need of modernization.<sup>88</sup>

The Baltiysky Zavod shipyard last finished a ship building order in 2004 and does not have any pending orders. This shipyard needs modernization, but upgrading the facility does not fit into the long term plans of St Petersburg. The city hopes to free up considerable space for “infrastructure expansion and housing construction.”<sup>89</sup> Both the Admiralty and Baltiysky Zavod shipyards occupy real estate on the waterfront of downtown St Petersburg. Neither has the expansion room that modernization would require. Nor is the Baltiysky Zavod shipyard yet a part of the OSK as of May 2010.

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86 Barabanov, *Russian Shipyards Review: Most Unable to Build Modern Ships, Need Modernization*.

87 Ibid.

88 Ibid.

89 Danilevich and Paleyeva, *Mistral from Kronstadt*.

Since the *Mistral* contract was awarded to a consortium of DCNS and OSK, construction at Baltiysky can be ruled out, not the least because it is also in serious financial trouble, with the bank that controls it, Mezhprombank having just had its banking license revoked for debts.<sup>90</sup>

The construction of the Russian *Mistrals* is to take place at a new facility being constructed at the Kronshtadt Naval Shipyard, on Kotlin Island, at the mouth of Neva Bay in St Petersburg. This new facility, which will become the main Admiralty Shipyard location, is viewed as a facility to not only build *Mistrals*, but also capable of building other modern civilian and military ships in future.<sup>91</sup> The Kronshtadt Naval Shipyard had been one of the major repair facilities for the Baltic Fleet. As such, it already has sizeable graving docks (with one large enough for a *Mistral*), which just need to be refurbished and modernized with new buildings and cranes. This would allow the construction to continue uninterrupted at other Russian shipyards. This may allow the Russian Navy to acquire more warships faster. But, the bottom line is that while it could be theoretically possible to build a *Mistral* in a current Russian shipyard via old building methods, no shipyard can build a *Mistral* in the French manner.

### **3. Further Arguments Against Domestic Design and Production Only**

General Makarov admitted that if Russia were to design a LHA/LHD, it would have taken “at least 10 years to develop a ship similar to the *Mistral*.”<sup>92</sup> He goes on to point that in the time it would take Russian design bureaus to either redesign a Project 11780 UDK or come up with a new design, newer, more modern designs would be developed by western nations.<sup>93</sup> This would mean that not only would the Russian Navy not get a warship inside of five years, but also probably get an outdated design in 2020. By contrast, a French-built *Mistral* could be in service as soon as 2014.<sup>94</sup> There may

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90 Khorunzhiy, *Russia: Ministry of Defense Will Probably Buy Helicopter Carriers from France*.

91 Danilevich and Paleyeva, *Mistral from Kronshtad*.

92 “Russian Military Justifies Purchase of Mistral Ships,” *RIA Novosti*, February 10, 2011.

93 *Ibid*.

94 Ilya Kramnik, “Mistral Deal Seals Russia-France Special Relationship,” *RIA-Novosti*, December 15, 2010.

have also been fears in trying to redesign a vessel, as evidenced by the issues Sevmash has had in redesigning the *ex-Admiral Gorshkov* aircraft carrier for the Indian navy. The *Gorshkov* was scheduled to be finished in 2008, however current reports indicate it may only be accepted by the Indian Navy sometime in 2012.<sup>95</sup>

Soon after news of the Russian Navy's interest in a *Mistral*-class vessel surfaced, the OSK indirectly admitted it did not have the necessary building ability by first proposing to form a joint venture with the South Korean firm of Daewoo Shipbuilding & Marine Engineering. The OSK proposed that Russia purchase from this joint venture the South Korean *Dokdo* LPH, which the OSK said could be built in three years. The Russian Ministry of Defense told the OSK that "talk is cheap,"<sup>96</sup> and rejected the idea. The OSK then signed an agreement with DCNS forming a shipbuilding consortium to bid on the *Mistral*, as well as agreed to build future civilian and military vessels.<sup>97</sup> This consortium also would include full technology transfers between DCNS and OSK. The fact that there was far less criticism of this consortium than the South Korean one again indicates that the French *Mistral* was the primary focus of Russia, not simply the most capable ship.

The willingness of OSK to form consortiums with foreign companies may be an admission that the OSK cannot realistically produce a new LHD/LHA from design to launch completely on its own. By teaming with foreign companies, the OSK will not only stay involved with the actual construction, but also stands to gain knowledge of more modern shipbuilding techniques.

#### **4. Tirpitz Plan Redux**

The Russian Navy's Commander in Chief, Admiral Vysotskiy, thought to be the Navy's chief proponent of the *Mistral*, is believed to have started the push after first seeing one in 2008.<sup>98</sup> This suggests that a desire to acquire a new system preceded

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95 "Gorshkov Price Settled at \$2.3 Billion," *Hindustan Times*, 2009.

96Dmitriy Belikov and Ivan Konovalov, "Russia: USC Wants to Build S. Korean Dokdo Ship Dock Under License," *Kommersant Online*, July 15, 2010.

97 "Russian, French Shipbuilders Form a Consortium," *RIA Novosti*, November 1, 2010.

98 Mikhail Barabanov, "Mesmerized by the French Navy," *The Moscow Times*, August 31, 2009.

identifying a required capability and developing a system to fulfill that capability. It recalls the Tirpitz Plan—German Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz’s push in 1898 to acquire a large battle fleet without any strategic rationale beyond the fact that fleets were seen as a symbol of national prestige. British First Lord Winston Churchill denounced Germany’s “luxury fleet” as an aggressive attack on Britain’s national security. This began a naval arms race that eventually terminated at the Battle of Jutland in 1916. Admiral Vysotskiy probably saw the *Mistral* as a way to elevate the navy’s profile within the country and Russia’s defense establishment with a large capital warship, as well as proclaim the navy’s dissatisfaction with the products it got from Russian shipyards. In July 2010, Admiral Vysotskiy participated in an interview on the Ekho Moskovy Military Council broadcast. In it he commented that as the Russian forces were moving away from a mobilization based system to one based on permanent units and forces, those new forces needed the ability to redeploy rapidly.<sup>99</sup> The *Mistral* would definitely be able to aid in this manner. Vysotskiy made another comment, where he said that the French correctly call a *Mistral* a “force projection and command ship”, and indicated that Russia would treat its *Mistral*’s the same way.<sup>100</sup> While the emphasis on the command and control will be supported elsewhere, this statement is one of the few places where any mention of projecting power is made. The direct amphibious assault capability was not mentioned by Vysotskiy, an important point indicating again how that capability is likely not the driving reason behind the selection of the *Mistral*.

Regardless of the reasons, it shows the purchase was a top down type decision, unsupported with an analysis of current Russian naval needs, or its impact on the strategic environment. The decision seems to have been driven at the highest levels of government, encouraged by French President Nicolas Sarkozy’s desire to create orders for French companies business and jobs for French workers.<sup>101</sup> When the agreement was signed on 25 January 2011, the French Defense Minister stated that the agreement would provide 6.2 million hours of work and secure 1,200 French jobs for four years for STX

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<sup>99</sup> Buntman and Yermolin, *Russia: CINC Vysotskiy Interviewed on Ekho Moscow Military Council Program*.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Pukhov, *A Strange Undertaking*. *Izvestiya*, November 25, 2009.

and DCNS.<sup>102</sup> The large number of jobs secured by the deal demonstrates why the French have gone to such lengths to accommodate Russian requests for technology and have been willing to negotiate on the price.

## 5. Lessons Learned From Georgia Conflict

The five-day war against Georgia in August of 2008 convinced some that *Mistral* warships in Russia's naval inventory could have filled important capability gaps. Admiral Vysotskiy famously commented that the *Mistral* would have reduced the time needed to for Russia to conquer Georgia from a day to forty minutes.<sup>103</sup> But his reasoning seems flawed. A *Mistral's* maximum speed is 19 knots, while the *Ropuchas* and *Alligators* in service at the time had a maximum speed of 16-18 knots. Therefore, a *Mistral* would have not transported troops from Sevastopol and Novorossiisk much faster to Georgia than the *Ropucha* LSTs that were actually used to transport troops.<sup>104</sup> The only place the *Mistral* could have made a difference was in offloading troops, depending on how they were loaded as well as where they were needed.

The Russians did land troops using *Ropucha* class LSTs during the conflict. The original plan was to sail into the port of Ochamchira. However, the LST's draft was too deep for the shallow channel into the harbor so they had to offload onto the beach.<sup>105</sup> The beach was fortunately (for the Russians) undefended and suitable for landing operations. A *Mistral* could have quickly moved troops ashore to various locations via helicopters, negating the risk of LSTs beaching themselves.

Perhaps one of the most important lessons learned was in regard to close air support, especially by attack helicopters. Due to the high elevation of the Caucasus mountain range and the summer conditions, helicopters could not cross from Russia over

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102 "French Defense Minister Says Mistral Deal with Russia Secures 1,200 Jobs," *France-3 Television*, January 25, 2011.

103 "For example, in the August conflict of last year a ship like that would have allowed the Black Sea Fleet to accomplish its missions in 40 minutes, not 26 hours, which was how long it took us" - *Navy C-in-C Vysotskiy Says Russia in Talks to Buy French Warship*.

104 Gorenburg, *The Mistral Sale: No Reason to Panic*.

105 M. S. Barabanov, A. V. Lavrov and V. A. Tseluiko, *The Tanks of August*, ed. R. N. Pukhov (Moscow: Centre for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies, 2010), 66.

to Georgia fully loaded and armed, so there was no attack helicopter close air support for the first few days of the conflict. Ground troops had to wait until a temporary air base was set up in South Ossetia before they could rely on attack helicopters for close air support.<sup>106</sup> It has been proposed that the Russian *Mistrals* will have some combination of Kamov helicopters on it.<sup>107</sup> One of the proposed helicopters is the extremely capable attack helicopter, the Ka-52 Alligator (HOKUM B), which has a combat range of 450km.<sup>108</sup> From the Georgian coast to Tbilisi is roughly 280 km. Therefore, having up to 16 Ka-52s sitting off the Georgian coast could have theoretically provided close air support to most of the western parts of Georgia. The assault transport Ka-29TB (HELIX B), has only about a 100km range<sup>109</sup>, one however that would still allow for the rapid deployment and redeployment of troops deep inside Georgian territory. Helicopters would also be very useful in controlling littoral areas. An area as crowded with shipping as the Black Sea is not a place that is conducive to long-range surface to surface missiles; attack helicopters most likely would be better suited for the interdiction and possible destruction of unknown vessels. Kamov has also developed a specific maritime version of its Ka-52 helicopter, the Ka-52MD. This maritime attack helicopter version will have specific maritime navigation and deck landing equipment, as well as the potential to employ the Kh-35 *Uran* air to surface missile (AS-20 KAYAK).<sup>110</sup> A dedicated maritime attack helicopter increases the *Mistral's* combat striking power, especially in littoral areas.

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106 Carolina Vendil Pallin and Fredrik Westerlund, "Russia's War in Georgia: Lessons and Consequences," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 20, no. 2 (2009), 408–409.

107 The Ka-27, 29, 52, 60 and 226 have all been rumored to have been considered for equipping a Russian *Mistral*. Ka-27 HELIX is a naval antisubmarine helicopter that can also be used for search and rescue. The Ka-29TB HELIX B is a naval combat and transport helicopter, capable of carrying 16 troops. The Ka-52 Alligator or HOKUM B is an advanced all weather attack helicopter. The Ka-60 Killer Whale is an advanced transport helicopter capable of carrying 16 troops faster and over greater range than the Ka-29. The Ka-226 HOODLUM is a light transport chopper which can carry 6 troops.

108 "Ka-50 Black Shark Attack Helicopter, Russia," Air Force-Technology.com (2011). <http://www.airforce-technology.com/projects/ka50/>.

109 "Ka-27/28 and Ka-29 Helix Naval Helicopters, Russia," Air Force-Technology.com (2011). <http://www.airforce-technology.com/projects/ka/>.

110 Piotr Butowski and Bernard Bombeau, "Moscow Commits to the 'Mistral'," *Air and Cosmos* (January 7, 2011), 38–39.

Another lesson learned was that Russian troops suffered from poor inter-service coordination, and poor command and control on both the operational and tactical levels.<sup>111</sup> The *Mistral*'s 800 square meters of command space could have been useful for the theatre commander. From a command ship off the coast, the theatre commander would have theoretically been able to control the entire battlefield, along with a full staff of up to 150 people. However, the rest of the armed forces need first to be equipped with the proper systems to communicate back to the *Mistral*. Furthermore, the command, control and communications needed for joint operations do not yet exist in the Russian forces.<sup>112</sup> So while a *Mistral* could be useful, it is not the missing link in Russian command and control – the entire system needs significant basic development first.

Besides the defense industry's failings, pressure from the top and Georgian lessons learned, there are two other reasons potentially pushing Russia toward a helicopter carrier, specifically the *Mistral*. Kamov is the main producer of naval helicopters for Russia, and also builds attack helicopters. Russia's other major helicopter manufacturer, Mil Moscow Helicopter Plant, has traditionally not designed helicopters for prolonged shipboard use. Furthermore, in 2006, control of both Kamov and Mil passed to Russian Helicopters, a holding of the Oboronprom Corporation. Much like the United Shipbuilding Corporation, Russian Helicopters oversees all domestic helicopter production.

If Russia purchases up to four helicopter carriers, each capable of carrying 16 helicopters, those helicopters have to come from somewhere. The Russian Navy is severely lacking naval assault helicopters, with only 28 Ka-29TB spread among the four fleets, and would need to buy new ones or refurbish existing models to equip its *Mistrals*.<sup>113</sup> This would provide a large contract to a domestic supplier and keep them well supplied with work. In July 2010 it was reported that Kamov may get a contract for

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111 Pallin and Westerlund, *Russia's War in Georgia: Lessons and Consequences*, 407.

112 Ibid., 414.

113 In 2010 Russian Naval aviation had for attack helicopters: 11 Mi-24 HIND (not designed for shipboard use) / for transport: 28 Ka-29 HELIX-B, 26 Mi-8 HIP and 10 Mi-6 HOOK (latter two not designed for shipboard use) and anti submarine missions: 70 Ka-27 HELIX D and 20 Mi-14 HAZE (not designed for shipboard use). "Chapter Five: Russia," *The Military Balance* 111, no. 1 (2011), 187.



at least 100 Ka-27 and Ka-52 if the *Mistrals* were bought.<sup>114</sup> The Ka-52 is already in production at Kamov Arseniev Plant in eastern Russia. Because the last Ka-29 was produced in 1993, the assembly line has long been closed. Instead of new construction, one report indicates that Kamov may attempt to modernize the remaining 28 (out of 59 built for USSR/Russia) with modern avionics and glass cockpits.<sup>115</sup> The requirement for a modern troop transport could also lend itself to the further development and acquisition of Kamov Ka-60 Killer Whale series of transport helicopters, which are currently undergoing testing (yet without firm orders). Besides attack and transport helicopters, other helicopters would also need to be purchased. Dedicated search and rescue (SAR) missions could require more Ka-27PS (HELIX D) orders, the dedicated SAR version as there are only 22 in service<sup>116</sup>. Early warning versions of the HELIX, the Ka-31 could also be purchased to give the Russian *Mistrals* an airborne early warning radar platform. Lastly the Ka-226 (HOODLUM) could also be used for utility missions. As these are only a few examples, the point is the Russian Navy does not currently own enough helicopters to outfit fully all four of their *Mistrals* to execute missions, while servicing the rest of their fleet. As Kamov is the primary producer of naval helicopters, it stands to reason that the *Mistral* contract will directly benefit Kamov as well.

The final point may be small, but still important. Russia has made it very clear that it wishes to acquire both the technologies and the licenses to produce domestically the equipment for the *Mistral*. Deputy Minister Popovkin has stated

Unlike some other countries, we are not engaged in clandestine copying of models; we openly say that we are prepared to pay for these technologies; we are prepared to buy licenses for the production of advanced hardware.<sup>117</sup>

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114 “Russian Air Force to Get Dozens of Helicopters if Mistral Deal Agreed,” *RIA-Novosti*, July 5, 2010.

115 Butowski and Bombeau, *Moscow Commits to the 'Mistral,'* 38–39.

116 *Chapter Five: Russia*, 187.

117 “Russia Wants to Buy Defence Technology, Not Copy it Secretly - Official,” *RIA-Novosti*, October 26, 2010.

This could be seen as a rebuke of the Chinese, especially since China has recently offered its clones of Russian fighter jets for sale.<sup>118</sup> This may indicate that Russia is trying to claim the high ground in world arm sales by demonstrating respect for international laws. It also works in Russia's favor if it wishes to purchase future arms from western nations. If it demonstrates that it is following international licensing agreements and copyrights, western nations would be more likely to sell again to Russia. Again, this is a very small point, but conceivably significant because Russia keeps bringing this point up. Perhaps this sale is Russia's method to show by example to China how foreign arms sales ought to be conducted.

#### **E. CURRENT RUSSIAN AMPHIBIOUS WARSHIPS**

While examining the potential reasons for the Russian interest in the *Mistral*, it is helpful to also look at what the Russian Navy currently possesses. According to the *2010 Military Balance*, the Russian Navy has one LPD (Landing Platform Dock) as its foremost amphibious ship as well as 22 medium landing ships (LS) and tank landing ships (LST). The *2011 Military Balance* no longer lists the *Ivan Rogov* LPD in active service and has counted a few amphibious transports that are in reserve for a total number of 25. The LPD is kept in the table for comparative purposes, but again the availability of the sole remaining *Ivan Rogov* is highly doubtful. The Russian Navy also has thirteen other landing craft, ranging from medium and light through a variety of air-cushioned vehicles designed to bring troops and equipment ashore. Table 2 summarizes the capabilities and sizes of the main Russian amphibious capability. It also includes the *Mistral's* capabilities as a point of comparison. Figure 9 shows the side profiles of each ship in comparative scale, giving a size comparison between the various warships.

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118 Jeremy Page, "China Clones, Sells Russian Fighter Jets," *Wall Street Journal*, December 6, 2010.

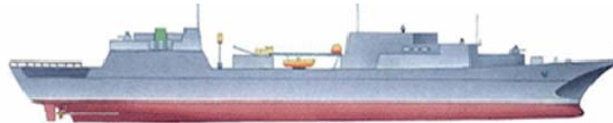


Figure 9. From top to bottom: *Mistral*, *Ivan Gren*, *Ivan Rogov*, *Ropucha*, *Alligator*, *Polnocny* to scale (from John Pike at Global Security.org, and *Mistral* from Y.Le Bris at shipshape.fr)

Table 2. Current Russian Amphibious Warships<sup>119</sup>

	Project 771 <i>Polnocny LST</i>	Project 1171 <i>Alligator LST</i>	Project 775/775M <i>Ropucha LST</i>	Project 1174 <i>Ivan Rogov LPD</i>	Project 1171.1 <i>Ivan Gren LST</i>	<i>Mistral BPC</i>
Year Class IOC	1967	1964	1975	1976	Scheduled for 2012	2014
# in service	1-6	4	15	0 likely	1 building	4 planned
Length (meters)	75	113	112	157	128	200
Displacement (tons)	772 tons	4,700 tons	4,471 tons	14,000 tons	Est 5,000 tons	21,947
Range (nm)	1,000	8,000	6,000	7,500	3,500	11,000
Max Speed (kts)	19	18	17.5	19	18	19
Military Troop Lift	180	300	190	522	300	450-900
Military Vehicle Lift	6 MBT	20 MBT	10 MBT or 24 APC	up to 53 MBT or 80 APC	13 MBT or 36 APC	13 MBT / 60 vehicles
Crew Size	42	55	95	239	100	188
Helicopters	none	none	none	4 Ka-29	1 Ka-29	16 Ka-29/52
Landing Craft	none	none	none	3 ACV or 6 LCM	unknown	4 LCU / 2 LCAC

It is evident that the Russian Navy retains the ability to move troops and equipment from the sea to the shore. The *Ropucha* class LSTs supplies the backbone of the Russian amphibious fleet, with a decent capability to carry troops and their equipment. Perhaps the most glaring weakness is a lack of aviation capability or an ability to offload troops and equipment without having to beach the landing ship, assuming there is one suitable for beach capable LSTs. The only other option is to pull

<sup>119</sup> All capability data is from Jane's Fighting Ships (<http://jdet.janes.com>) and Wertheim, *Naval Institute Guide to Combat Fleets of the World*. Current numbers of vessels is from *Jane's* and Chapter Five: *Russia*, 186.

into a developed port and offload. Another weakness of the current Russian amphibious fleet is the relatively short ranges of its vessels, particularly of the new *Ivan Gren* class. The *Mistral* would bring a much larger unrefueled cruising range to the capabilities of the Russian Navy.

#### F. NEW RUSSIAN AMPHIBIOUS WARSHIPS BESIDES THE *MISTRAL*

The *Ivan Gren*, Project 1171.1 is an updated modification of the older *Alligator* landing tank ships. Its main innovation is an ability to use floating pontoons to support a long bow ramp to transfer armored vehicles to the shore, thus removing the necessity of the *Ivan Gren* to beach itself.<sup>120</sup> While it can also carry standard cargo containers it has an extremely limited aviation capacity. Its helicopter deck will only be able to support one Ka-29 HELIX B medium size helicopter.<sup>121</sup> The lead ship of the class was laid down in the Yantar shipyard in the Kaliningrad region in 2004, and according to the general director of the yard, it will be handed over to the Russian Navy in later 2012 or early 2013.<sup>122</sup> The fact that it will have taken 8–9 years to build a LST is another example of why the Russian Navy is reluctant to rely on domestic shipbuilders to produce new warships on time.

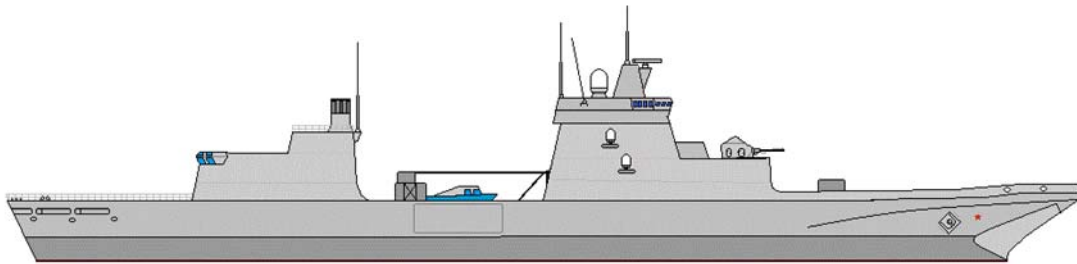


Figure 10. Another artist conception of a completed *Ivan Gren* LST  
(From: anonymous)

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120 Dmitry Gorenburg, Henry Gaffney and Ken Gause, *The Current State of the Russian Navy, May 2008* (Alexandria, Virginia: Center for Strategic Studies [2008]), 48.

121 Wertheim, *Naval Institute Guide to Combat Fleets of the World*, 633.

122 “Project Ivan Gren Landing Ship to be Ready in 2012 Or 2013 - Shipyard Head,” *Interfax*, April 19, 2010.

## G. CURRENT RUSSIAN AMPHIBIOUS CAPABILITY

In addition to the amphibious warships that the Russian Navy still owns, it is evident that it still possesses an amphibious capability – amphibious assaults were a principle part of Russia’s major operational strategic exercise Zapad 2009. Seven large landing ships of the *Ropucha* class participated in amphibious landings on a defended shoreline on the coast of the Kaliningrad region.<sup>123</sup> More recently, in July 2010, the major exercise Vostok 2010 again involved practicing opposed amphibious landings with ships from all four of the Russian fleets (Baltic, Black Sea, Northern and Pacific).<sup>124</sup> The quick conclusion is that the Russian Navy is still capable of performing some types of amphibious landings without a *Mistral*. However, the majority of the troops assaulted the beachhead via hovercraft (which were launched from Russian shores, not from other landing ships), smaller landing craft, and amphibious vehicles such as BMP-2. Few troops came ashore via helicopter, primarily because the vast majority of amphibious assault ships did not support helicopter operations. Only the *Ivan Rogov* class LPD has helicopter facilities, and none participated in the exercises.

In both exercises, the *Ropuchas* and *Alligator* LST offloaded the majority of their troops and cargo via bow ramps directly onto the beach (see Figure 11).

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123 Aleksandr Ryabushev, “The Amphibious Assault Wave Covers the Shore: The President of Russia and Belarus are Expected at the Exercise's Concluding Phase,” *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, September 11, 2009.

124 “Vostok-2010 Games: A Test of Russia's New Army,” *RIA-Novosti*, July 12, 2010.



Figure 11. A *Ropucha* has its bow doors open and landing ramp displayed. (From PH3 Dawn Schmelhaun, U.S. Navy)

This type of amphibious landing is impossible if the shoreline is defended by enemy tanks, artillery or surface-to-surface missiles. Another point of note is that while the World War II-style beach assault, with LSTs offloading troops and tanks onto the beach, looks impressive, the majority of the world's shorelines are not conducive to such an assault.<sup>125</sup> Less than 17 percent of the world's coastlines are capable of supporting a conventional, D-day style landing. But almost 80 percent of them are suitable for air cushioned landing craft (LCAC) and other ground effect vehicles.<sup>126</sup> The Russian Navy can only realistically carry out a direct amphibious assault on a beach. Effectively moving troops and equipment ashore requires a combination of helicopters and smaller landing craft, which are designed to carry both troops and equipment. The current problem for Russia is that they do not have the numbers of dedicated assault landing craft

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125 Kramnik, *The Agony of Choice: Russia Looking for Best Amphibious Assault Ship*.

126 "Taiwan Report on PLA Over-Horizon Amphibious Capability," *Chueh-Ch i Tung-Ya: Chu-Chiao Hsin-Shih-Chi Chieh-Fang-Chun, Taipei*, September 1, 2009.

to execute a large-scale amphibious assault from over the horizon. As of 2011, the Russia Navy is has only thirteen landing craft and five air cushioned boats.<sup>127</sup>

The larger problem is that the necessary “mother ships” or ships to carry the landing craft also do not exist in the Russian Navy. Neither the *Ropuchas*, *Alligators* nor *Polnocny* have the capability to deploy landing craft. These LSTs are designed for direct beach offloading, or for amphibious vehicles to drive off their ramps into the sea. The *Ivan Rogov* could carry landing craft and assault hovercrafts in its well deck. However, the only remaining *Ivan Rogov* class vessel, the *Mitrophan Moskalenko*, is no longer believed to remain in service. As for the new *Ivan Gren* class under construction, it is designed as a LST to replace the *Alligator* class, not the *Ivan Rogov* class. The *Ivan Grens* do not have a well deck to deploy landing craft, hovercraft or amphibious vehicles. The only option available potentially to the *Ivan Gren* would be to carry LCU/LCM on its deck and deploy them via its onboard crane. Since the lead vessel has yet to be commissioned, much remains unknown about her true amphibious capabilities and how/if it could carry and deploy landing craft.

Current amphibious aviation assault capability is also severely lacking both in helicopters and aviation capable ships. In 2011, Russian Naval Aviation was reported to have 54 transport helicopters.<sup>128</sup> Of these, only 28 are dedicated naval assault helicopters (Ka-29 HELIX B). The other 26 helicopters are Mi-8 HIPs, which have never been observed during extended naval operations. The ships to employ these helicopters from do not exist either. None of the Russian LSTs even have a helicopter pad, with the exception of the *Ivan Gren* which will carry only a single helicopter. Again, the *Ivan Rogov* class had the capability for four helicopters but the availability of the remaining *Rogov* is suspect.

The *Ropucha*'s and *Alligators* do not give Russia a standoff or over the horizon amphibious capability. In summary, with only one possible *Ivan Rogov* LPD, and only two new *Ivan Gren* LSTs under construction, the Russian Navy does not possess the

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<sup>127</sup> *Chapter Five: Russia*, 186.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.



capability to execute any type of over the horizon amphibious assault against a defended shoreline. The *Mistral* would be the first warship in over 30 years that would allow the Russian Navy to even consider an over the horizon amphibious assault.

#### **H. OTHER COMPARABLE AMPHIBIOUS ASSAULT WARSHIPS TO THE *MISTRAL***

At the Euronaval 2010 naval exhibition in Le Bourget north of Paris, Russia announced an international tender for the purchase of two amphibious assault ships and the transfer of technology to construct future warships.<sup>129</sup> While it was assumed by many that the tender was simply a formality because the *Mistral* purchase had already been agreed upon, potentially competing amphibious assault vessels are briefly examined here by way of comparison with the *Mistral* (see Table 3).

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<sup>129</sup> “Russian Defence Ministry Announces International Tender for Helicopter Carriers,” *RIA-Novosti*, October 26, 2010.

Table 3. Amphibious Warships Considered in Russian tender<sup>130</sup>

	<i>Mistral</i>	<i>Juan Carlos</i>	<i>Dokdo</i>	<i>Johan de Witt</i>	<i>Project 11780 Kherson (unbuilt)</i> <sup>131</sup>
Type	LHDM/BPC	LHD	LPD	LPD	LHA
Country of Origin	France	Spain	South Korea	Netherlands	Russia
Length (meters)	199	230.8	200	176.4	200
Beam (meters)	32	32	32	29.2	50
Displacement (tons)	21,947	27,514	19,305	16,948	30,000-40,000
Range (nm)	11,000	9,000	unknown	10,000	5,000
Troop lift	450 (900 for short durations)	902	700	555	1,000
Vehicle lift	13 MBT / 60 Armored vehicles	46 MBT	10 MBT	170 APC / 33 MBT	unknown
Helicopters	16	30	10	6	25
Helicopter landing spots	6	6	5	2	6
Landing craft	4 LCU / 2 LCAC	2 LCAC	2 LCAC	4 LCVP + 2 LCU / 2 LCM	2-4 hovercraft
Crew size	188	243	400	701	unknown
Speed (kts)	19	21	22	19	30
Propulsion	Diesel electric / 2 Podded propulsors	CODAGE / gas turbine, diesel, 2 podded propulsors	CODAD / 2 shafts	Diesel electric / 2 podded propulsors	Steam turbines
CODAD – Combined diesel and diesel – 2 engines powering one propeller. CODAGE – Combined diesel and gas turbine–powering a generator which powers electric motors					

<sup>130</sup> All data on *Mistral*, *Juan Carlos*, *Dokdo* and *Johann de Witt* from *Jane's Fighting Ships*, <http://jdet.janes.com>.

<sup>131</sup> Because the Project 11780 was never built, specifications are estimates only from the builder's plans. Data from Kramnik, *The Agony of Choice: Russia Looking for Best Amphibious Assault Ship* and Mozgovi, *Turns of the Plotline. Projects by Russian Design Bureaus are Not Inferior to Foreign Ones*.



Figure 12. *Johan de Witt* LPD (From Sergeant Major Gerben Van Es, Dutch Air Force / U.S. Navy)



Figure 13. *Juan Carlos* LHD (From Spanish Navy)



Figure 14. *Dokdo* LPD. (From Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Greg Mitchell, U.S. Navy)

The point here is that the *Mistral* is hardly unique. All five designs are relatively comparable in terms of having a mix of troop transport capability as well as an aviation component. Three designs have the new podded propulsion systems. The *Mistral* did not offer a clear-cut advantage in multiple categories by itself. That said, there were some strong preconditions that basically guaranteed the *Mistral* design as the winner. The preconditions had nothing to do with capability however. First, all the designs except the French and Russian ones were likely subject to the US International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITAR) policy. The United States could restrict certain technologies and components in Korean, Dutch and Spanish projects because they were American made or developed systems and technologies. The *Mistral* by comparison, has no U.S. components in it.<sup>132</sup> This fact alone removed the possibility of Washington blocking the sale; instead, strongly worded statements of disapproval are the most it could muster. Since the Russians desired not only the ships themselves, but also the associated technologies, it made sense for Moscow to go with a country that could offer the most. The Spanish would also certainly have hesitated to jeopardize U.S. relations over the sale

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<sup>132</sup> “French Helicopter Carrier Thought Favorite in Russian Tender,” *Interfax-AVN*, November 18, 2010.

an amphibious warship to Russia. The Spanish *Alvaro de Bazan* (F100 frigate) class warships were the first European ships to be fitted with the U.S. Navy's Aegis radar system.<sup>133</sup> Madrid would not risk jeopardizing future technology transfers from the United States. Also, the *Juan Carlos* LHD was designed for operation of vertical take-off and landing jets (VSTOL), such as the F-35B Joint Strike Fighter. Russia has no VSTOL aircraft or plans to acquire such aircraft – therefore, a purpose built vessel for those capabilities would be superfluous.

Perhaps one inference from the Russian selection may be that the Russians were looking at ships that had a significant aviation capability over a pure assault transport. The focus on aviation could indicate a desire for a multi-mission ship over pure assault via landing craft or simple main battle tank transport. While Russia may not have chosen the *Mistral* based solely on capabilities, the *Mistral* does vastly add to the navy's overall capability. But again, the Russians wanted the French ship for the technology transfer of advanced electronics – the capabilities were a bonus. The tender, it is believed, was offered simply to exert pressure to include more technology at a lower price.<sup>134</sup>

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133 "F100 Alvaro De Bazan Multi-Purpose Frigate, Spain," Net Resources International, <http://www.naval-technology.com/projects/f100/>.

134 Khorunzhiy, *Russia: Ministry of Defense Will Probably Buy Helicopter Carriers from France*.

## I. MISTRAL CAPABILITIES



Figure 15. Internal cutaway of *Mistral* showing deck layout. Also note propulsion system (from enibule.com)

As has been discussed the U.S. Navy classifies the *Mistral* as a Landing Helicopter Dock (LHD) type vessel while the French designation is that of a “*Bâtiment de Projection et de Commandement*” (Forward Deployment and Command Vessel). This BPC/LHD can perform the duties of a LHD but also has a significant command and control capability. The *Mistral* is a 200 meters long multi-purpose ship with 21,300 tons displacement fully loaded. Because it is built to commercial vice naval standards, construction techniques to prevent combat or other significant damage are less stringent.

It can transport 16 helicopters, 450 troops (900 for short periods), and 13 main battle tanks (MBT) or 70 vehicles over two decks (see Figure 15). The Russians may look to rearrange the interior spaces of the *Mistral*. The French version provides accommodations for 450 troops in staterooms of two, four and six men.<sup>135</sup> If the Russians opt for more austere conditions and prioritize troop capacity over marine comfort, the normal troop capacity may be around 900-1,000 troops. On the other hand, the Russians may retain French configurations to save time and minimize redesign costs.

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<sup>135</sup> Manseck, *BPC “Mistral” Class*, 94.

Deputy Defense Minister Popovkin has gone on record to say that only minimal design alterations will be considered.<sup>136</sup> Modular construction could allow for refits at a later time. There has also been a greater emphasis on crew comfort in newer designs than traditionally found in Soviet era designs. The *Ivan Gren's* designers spent time identifying how to improve the living spaces and conditions for both the ship's crew and embarked assault force.<sup>137</sup> A typical Soviet era design, such as the *Alligator* LST had notoriously poor accommodations for its embarked marines.<sup>138</sup> As part of its modernization effort and perhaps in view of a potential future professional military force vice conscripts, the Russian Navy may be focusing on improving crew conditions to improve conditions of naval service. Also there is the fact that the current missions of the Russian Naval Infantry do not dictate a need to carry 1,000 men all in one ship.

In addition to using helicopters to disembark troops, the *Mistral* can also deploy troops via landing craft from its well deck. With an 885.5m<sup>2</sup> well deck (57.5 m long by 15.4 m wide by 8.2 m high), the *Mistral* can nominally accommodate four medium landing craft or two U.S. Navy LCACs (landing craft air cushioned).<sup>139</sup> In terms of Russian equipment, as currently designed, a single *Mistral* could carry either two *Dyugon* LCU or four *Serna* LCU or four *Ondatra* LCMs.<sup>140</sup> In terms of hovercraft, two *Lebed* ACV could instead be carried.

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136 "First Two Mistral Will have Russian Arms and Helicopters, although Need Refitting," ITAR-TASS, [http://rusnavy.com/news/navy/index.php?ELEMENT\\_ID=11587](http://rusnavy.com/news/navy/index.php?ELEMENT_ID=11587) (accessed February 25, 2011).

137 Aleksandr Karpenko, "The First Assault Landing Vessel in the 21st Century: Construction of a Project 11711 Large Assault Landing Vessel for the Russian Navy has Begun," *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer*, February 2, 2005.

138 Embarked troops in *Alligator* LSTs were "accommodated below the tank deck under cramped conditions in the lower No.3 hold." Wertheim, *Naval Institute Guide to Combat Fleets of the World*, 634.

139 *Ibid.*, 219.

140 The *Ondatra* LCM can carry 1 MBT. The *Dyugon* LCU can carry 120 tons of troops and vehicles, while the *Serna* LCU can carry 45 tons or 100 troops. The *Lebed* ACV can carry 40 tons of cargo or 120 troops.



Figure 16. Picture showing the open well deck of *Mistral* (From Jean Louis Venne)

The ship is equipped with a 69-bed hospital capable of providing international Level 3 primary casualty support. If additional space for casualties is required, the hospital can be expanded into the hangar bay. The *Mistral* also contains a modern command center capable of supporting a staff of 150 people. The ship has an advanced propulsion system, where there are no propeller shafts. Instead, the shafts and propellers are replaced by two rotating engine pods with propellers to give the *Mistral* exceptional maneuverability (see Figure 17).



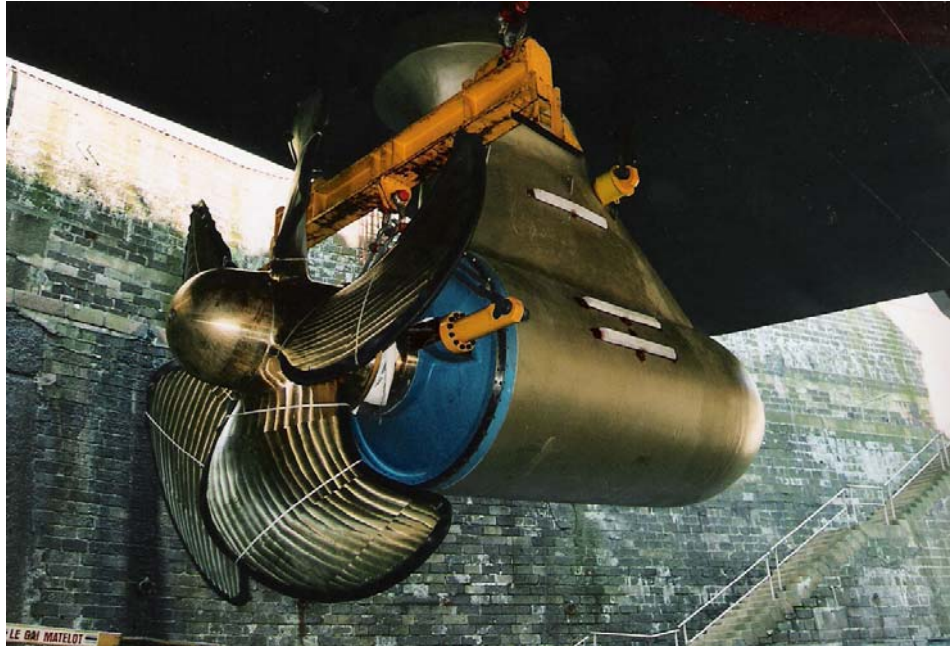


Figure 17. Picture of Azipod on BPC *Mistral* (from Vincent Groizeleau)

The ship is also highly automated allowing for a small permanent crew of only 188 sailors.<sup>141</sup> Compared even to other modern LHD designs, this is a very low number (see earlier Table 4). This is another beneficial bonus of the *Mistral*, with the Russian Navy's manpower issues and difficulties in moving toward a non-conscript based force. Having a highly automated warship would make it easier to man and potentially increase its deployment availability compared to other Russian warships. However, fewer crew members means more reliance on automated systems to control the ship, including damage control efforts. While on a cruise liner with such automated systems, damage control is less of a concern, but they become primordial on a warship sailing into hostile waters. The commercial build specification also means that there are less watertight compartments than required for military specifications. As an example, the *Mistral* has only one main machinery room, which means one hit could immobilize the entire ship.<sup>142</sup> The fact that Russia is willing to acquire a less robust design may indicate it is not as concerned with the possibility of significant battle damage as with gaining a multi-

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<sup>141</sup> Manseck, *BPC "Mistral" Class*, 89.

<sup>142</sup> Dmitry Mamin, "Mistral Sailed Away, Open Issues Stayed," <http://rusnavy.com/nowadays/concept/reforms/guestfromtoulon/intro/> (accessed January 2, 2011).

mission platform. Another indication may be that Russia does not envision operating its *Mistrals* in a high intensity conflict area.

Compared to Soviet era and current Russian warships, the *Mistral* is basically unarmed and would require multiple escort ships if it ever were to sail into harm's way. The *Mistral* only carries two very short-range defense missile launchers, two 30-millimeter cannon and four machine guns.<sup>143</sup> In comparison, Russian ship designs have always incorporated heavy armament on all their major warships, allowing a measure of self protection from a variety of threats.<sup>144</sup> The Russians have already discussed significantly upgrading the *Mistral's* defensive capability.

Beyond stronger defensive weapons, the Russian have also asked for specific modifications to the flight deck, hangar bay, and elevators together with modifications to allow for sustained Arctic operations.<sup>145</sup> The design modifications have to be made to accommodate the Ka-29 HELIX and Ka-52 HOKUM B helicopters. As the Ka-29 double rotor design is over four feet higher than the French Navy's NH-90 transport helicopter's rotors, the entire hangar deck has to be raised. Also because the Russian helicopters are heavier than their French counterparts, the flight deck itself along with the two helicopter elevators must be reinforced as well.<sup>146</sup> The official position has been that the design modifications are minor. Yet in March 2011, the design modifications themselves were rumored to be one source of the disagreement on price between Russia and France.<sup>147</sup> There have also been claims that the Arctic modifications will require a redesign of the hull as well as of the ventilation systems,<sup>148</sup> so that ice will not form

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143 Manseck, *BPC "Mistral" Class*, 92.

144 For example, the largest amphibious warship in the Russian Navy, the *Ivan Rogov* class, carries two types of missile systems, both a short range and point defense system, two 76-millimeter cannons, one 122-millimeter cannon, two 40-barreled rocket launchers and four 30-millimeter cannons. "Ivan Rogov (Yednorog) (Project 1174) Class," <http://search.janes.com.libproxy.nps.edu/>, (accessed September 2, 2010).

145 Aleksandr Artemyev, "France Agrees to Share Mistral Shipbuilding Technology," *Gazeta.Ru*, October 26, 2010.

146 The maximum takeoff weight of the NH90 is 23,369 pounds, and while the Ka-52 maximum takeoff weight of 22,925 pounds is similar, the Ka-27/29 HELIX family has a maximum weight of 26,455/25,353 pounds, which is significantly more. Data from *Jane's All the World's Aircraft*, 2010.

147 "Waters Still Choppy for Mistral Deal," *Intelligence Online, Paris*, March 17, 2011.

148 Aleksandr Mozgovoi, "Polundra. K Nam Idet Frantsuzskiy UDK," *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, January 21, 2011.

inside the hangar bay. Instead forced ventilation systems for the hangar bay will need to be developed. While the extent of the redesign and modifications remains to be seen, it is certain that, while the Russian *Mistrals* most likely will be outwardly similar to the French versions, they will not be sister ships.



Figure 18. French BPC/LHD *Mistral* underway (From French Navy, Meretmarine.com)<sup>149</sup>

## J. RUSSIAN NAVAL CAPABILITY GAPS

Based on the warships currently in the Russian inventory and the six *Ivan Gren* LSTs planned for, it becomes obvious that the Russian Navy lacks both the helicopters and the warships to conduct an aviation assault from the sea or a standoff amphibious assault. It is then very interesting to note that the Russian Ministry of Defense has stated the *Mistral's* primary role will be that of a command and control vessel, with its assault function to be secondary.<sup>150</sup> Other Russian sources even have the assault function to be a

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149 "Birmanie: La France Envoie Le BPC Mistral Au Secours Des Sinistrés," Mer et Marine, <http://www.meretmarine.com/article.cfm?id=107586> (accessed August 15, 2010).

150 "Russian Defense Ministry Source Says Mistral to be Command and Control Ship," *Nakanune.Ru*, February 26, 2010.

tertiary mission, with command and control missions and delivering attack and antisubmarine helicopters to assigned areas as more important.<sup>151</sup> This has led to a conclusion that as Russia wants a total of four, this must mean the Russian Navy is planning on placing one in each of its fleets as a command vessel or flagship.<sup>152</sup>

One idea could be that the Russians are looking to revitalize each fleet from the top down.<sup>153</sup> This would mean starting with the capital ships first, and then build/acquire the necessary escort ships, rather than starting small and working toward the large ships. In looking at some capability gaps that the *Mistral* could fill in the Russian Navy, it becomes evident that the majority of those gaps are related to soft power. While the *Mistral* does have striking power, or hard power, the way it is optimized and considering the supporting elements makes it more likely that the Russians are intent on using their *Mistrals* for missions other than direct amphibious assault.

## 1. Command and Control

Before looking at the official Russian plans, it is important to analyze the command ship role in the Soviet/Russian Navy. The Soviet Navy converted two *Sverdlov* class cruisers in 1971 to command ships<sup>154</sup> and in addition commissioned the SSV-33 *Ural* (*Kapusta* class) large command/intelligence ship in 1988.<sup>155</sup> These were decommissioned in 1991 and 2002 respectively. They were never used in a true fleet command role, such as the US Navy's *Blue Ridge* class, currently used as the flagships for the US Navy's 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Fleets. The SSV-33 *Ural* was utilized more as an intelligence collection asset than as a command ship. The Soviet tradition for a fleet flagship has always been for it to be the most powerfully armed ship in the fleet. This is

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151 "Mistrals to Perform Command Tasks in Russian Navy," ARMS-TASS, February 21, 2011. [http://rusnavy.com/news/navy/index.php?ELEMENT\\_ID=11542](http://rusnavy.com/news/navy/index.php?ELEMENT_ID=11542).

152 Russia's four fleets are the Northern Fleet based at Severomorsk, the Pacific Fleet based at Vladivostok, the Black Sea Fleet based at Sevastopol and the Baltic Fleet based at Kaliningrad.

153 Sergey Ptichkin, "Mistral – Engine of Progress? Or what Kind of Modernization does the Russian Navy Need?" *Rossiyskiye Vesti*, November 8, 2010.

154 "Light Cruisers – Project 68bis / Project 68bis-ZIF / NATO: Sverdlov Class," Russian-Ships.info, 2010, [http://www.russian-ships.info/eng/warships/project\\_68bis.htm](http://www.russian-ships.info/eng/warships/project_68bis.htm).

155 "Large Nuclear-Powered Intelligence Ship - Project 1941 Titan / NATO: Kapusta Class," Russian-Ships.info, 2010. [http://russian-ships.info/eng/intelligence/project\\_1941.htm](http://russian-ships.info/eng/intelligence/project_1941.htm).

why the Russian Navy's fleet flagship is its sole aircraft carrier, the *Admiral Kuznetsov*. As for the other fleets, the *Peter the Great* (Kirov class) is the Northern Fleet Flagship, and the *Slava* class cruisers *Moskva* and *Varyag* are the Black Sea and Pacific Fleet flagships respectively. The *Mistrals* would not take over any fleet's flagship role. The Soviet tradition of command at sea is summed up by former chief of the Main Staff and deputy commander in chief of the Russian Navy Admiral Selivanov: "A fleet commander must maintain his headquarters on the most powerful ship, having the most reliable means of anti-air and anti-submarine defense and the most effective command and communications systems....assumptions about the Mistral as a headquarters ship are empty dilettante twaddle."<sup>156</sup>

While his comments may be valid about the armament, his is off the mark about the command and control facilities on the *Mistral*. Four warships, each with a command center for 150 people, is a capability unheard of in the Russian Navy right now. Admiral Vysotskiy has said with the command and control abilities: "... if a *Mistral* is, say, in the Indian Ocean, it will have information about the Atlantic, Arctic, (about) simply everywhere."<sup>157</sup> While this is perhaps an overstatement, it drives home the point that the advance communications/control systems are exactly what the Russians are after, and why they want the full technology transfer with the sale, not just an empty hull. While it is extremely unlikely that a Russian *Mistral* would be classified as a fleet flagship or even used for a traditional command at sea currently, the theatre level command and control may be more what Russia is looking for, especially in areas such as the Far East where established ground command posts are few and far between. There has also been repeated Russian emphasis on moving toward a net centric command and control system. In July 2010, General Makarov told reporters that by 2015, Russia wants to have all its troops connected by new command and control systems in one information space.<sup>158</sup> A

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156 *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, "Russia: Former Admiral Says Medvedev 'Does Not Know' Navy's Real Condition."

157 Aleksey Pernetty, "Blue with Helicopter," *Kommersant Online*, October 25, 2010.

158 Russian Defense Policy, *General Staff Chief Makarov's Press Conference*. WordPress.com, July 14, 2010. <https://russiandefpolicy.wordpress.com/2010/07/14/general-staff-chief-makarovs-press-conference/>.

*Mistral*, or rather the technologies that a *Mistral* would have installed, would significantly help the Russian military in those modernization efforts.

## **2. Hospital Ship or Disaster Relief Warship**

The Russian Navy also lacks a warship suited to Noncombatant Evacuation Operation (NEO) missions. In late February 2011, during the unrest in Libya, Russia set about evacuating Russian citizens from the country. To do so, it planned to send four Il-76 transports as well as a passenger ferry which could hold 1,000 people.<sup>159</sup> A civilian ship had to be sent as well as the Russian Navy lacks any type of vessel that could evacuate up to 950 people at once. In comparison, the French actually sent the *Mistral* to Libya to help evacuate foreign workers.<sup>160</sup> Transport aircraft are helpful in NEOs, but only so long as an airport is available, which may not be the case during civil unrest or natural disasters. Also useful during civil unrest NEOs, is the ability to support or protect the evacuation of citizens with military forces. Granted the Russian Navy could pull off a NEO operation of 1,000 people and provide military support, but it would take multiple ships vice one *Mistral*. Getting multiple ships underway quickly (or even having them available) for a NEO operation is obviously more difficult than simply getting one to sea.

The 69 bed full hospital of the *Mistral* is also an important capability in both combat and humanitarian assistance missions. The Russian Navy though is not lacking a hospital ship capability. As of 2011, Russia has three *Ob* (Project 320) hospital ships in service, one each in the Black Sea Fleet, Northern Fleet and Pacific Fleet.<sup>161</sup> These hospital ships all have 100 beds and seven operating rooms each, more than the *Mistral*. They also have helicopter landing facilities, although not as significant as a *Mistral's*. A *Mistral* may be more suited to responding to a limited or as a first responder to a humanitarian crisis. The *Mistral* would not be able to replace an *Ob*, but this would be similar to US Navy operations. During Operation Unified Response assisting the 2010

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<sup>159</sup> "Russia Sends Planes, Ship to Evacuate Foreigners from Riot-Struck Libya," *RIA Novosti*, February 22, 2011.

<sup>160</sup> "France to Send Helicopter Carrier to Libya to Support Evacuations," *AFP (Domestic Service)*, March 2, 2011.

<sup>161</sup> *Chapter Five: Russia*, 186.

Haiti earthquake victims, US Navy LHDs and LSDs arrived on station first before the hospital ship USNS *Comfort* arrived. A Russian *Mistral* would give the Russian Navy a better first responder-capable vessel.

### 3. Long Range Cruises to Show the Flag

Another reason may be that the Russian Navy is trying to acquire large warships to show the flag or project Russian presence around the world, or in areas of national interest. Any hope that Russia had of building aircraft carriers was dashed in December 2010 when Defense Minister Serdyukov said there were no plans to build any aircraft carriers “for the foreseeable future”.<sup>162</sup> This was in response to leaks from the Russian Defense Ministry that Russia would start constructing aircraft carriers by 2020. Normally countries send their largest and most powerful warships to conduct show the flag operations. For the Russian Navy, this leaves the *Admiral Kuznetsov* and *Peter the Great*. It has already been announced that the *Admiral Kuznetsov* will undergo a major refit that will remove it from operational service from 2012 till 2017.<sup>163</sup> While a *Mistral* is not an extremely powerful ship in terms of ship-mounted weapons, it could bring limited striking power with its embarked Ka-52 attack helicopters as well as its embarked naval infantry. In addition, it is a large ship. The Russian Navy may be reasoning that the *Mistrals* would be the next best thing to an aircraft carrier. The Russian Navy may also be looking to acquire warships that can show the flag on long distance cruises. As mentioned earlier, a *Mistral* has an unrefueled range of 11,000 nm.<sup>164</sup> Besides the nuclear powered battle cruisers in the Russian Navy, the *Mistrals* would have some of the longest ranges. Normally Russian warships have cruised with tugs and oilers in support in cruises to places such as Venezuela in 2008. A brand new *Mistral* or several *Mistrals* would likely remove this logistical requirement. Not having to send warships with a tug trailing along would be a significant prestige boost for the Russian Navy. The endurance

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<sup>162</sup> “Russia Defense Minister Denies Plans to Build Aircraft Carriers,” *RIA Novosti*, December 10, 2010.

<sup>163</sup> Ilya Kramnik, “Moscow Set to Upgrade Admiral Kuznetsov Aircraft Carrier,” *RIA Novosti*, April 6, 2010.

<sup>164</sup> *Jane’s Fighting Ships*, “Mistral LHD/BPC.”

of a *Mistral* with 450 marines aboard is also touted as 45 days, again giving the Russian Navy significant range to operate. Furthermore, the addition of a capital ship such as the *Mistral* will allow Russia to send different warships vice always sending the same ones, such as the *Peter the Great* or *Admiral Chabanenko* (a *Udaloy-II* class destroyer, often seen on foreign port visits). An important point to remember though will be since the *Mistral* is relatively un-protected, either it will need to sail with an escort if any military activities are intended, or it will be cruising simply showing the Russian flag.

#### 4. Amphibious Assault

The necessary landing craft and helicopters are required to conduct effectively an amphibious assault. As it has already been mentioned, with only 28 Ka-29 HELIX B assault helicopters, Russian naval aviation would barely be able to equip its four *Mistrals* with seven each. The sea based attack helicopter capability does not fully exist either. However, as discussed earlier, there have been plans to acquire more helicopters.

The landing craft piece of the puzzle is also in similar shape. The primary landing craft in Russian service have been the *Lebed* Air Cushioned Vehicle (ACV) and *Ondatra* LCM. Yet the *Lebed* ACV and *Ondatra* LCM were commissioned in 1979 and 1975 respectively, and are getting old. To replace them, the *Dyugon* and *Serna* class LCUs are being procured. In 2011, it was estimated that Russia had seven *Sernas* in service as well as a single *Dyugon*.<sup>165</sup> *Jane's Fighting Ships* estimates that four *Dyugon's* are proposed in total. Other sources though only see one *Dyugon* being constructed and no more *Sernas*.<sup>166</sup> In the best case, these new craft give the Russian Navy a total of eight newer LCU and eight older LCM/ACVs. Four *Mistrals* have the capacity for 16 LCUs maximum, so it would seem that the Russian Navy would barely be able to equip its LHD with the appropriate landing craft. As a single *Serna* or *Dyugon* can carry one hundred plus troops, four such LCUs could almost offload the entire normal complement of naval infantry from the *Mistral*.

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<sup>165</sup> *Chapter Five: Russia*, 186.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 194.



There are no current open source reports that indicate that Russia is looking at constructing new assault hovercraft. According to the *2011 Military Balance*, Russia does not even have assault hovercrafts that are capable of being carried aboard a *Mistral*. So any seaborne assault would likely be via landing craft themselves or “swimming vehicles”—vehicles that are amphibious. There also seems to be a lack of upgrades to the equipment used by the naval infantry. Currently, the naval infantry has no primary floating armor capable of landing, as the Soviet era PT-76 amphibious tank has been retired and the infantry’s other tank, the T-72, is not amphibious.<sup>167</sup> Other newer Russian armored vehicles, such as the BMP-3 infantry fighting vehicle or 2S25 Sprut-SD 125mm self propelled antitank gun had not been accepted in large numbers by the naval infantry yet.<sup>168</sup> So, even if Russia has new amphibious assault ships, the naval infantry still needs new equipment if they were to assault a defended shoreline by sea. Still, Russia possess currently the ability to conduct a limited seaborne assault. But the lack of significant investments in assault equipment indicates that these missions are not the navy’s highest priority.

Currently the investments seem to indicate a desire to keep the capability, but not extend it greatly. The helicopter acquisitions gives the multi-mission focus that Russia is looking for now, not purely an assault mission. Of course, this could all change between now and the delivery of *Mistrals* to Russia in the coming years. But for now, while the *Mistral* could fill capability gaps in the Russian Navy, it seems rather that the navy is finding roles for the ship to do, vice identifying a need and then a specific platform to solve that problem. The Russians may have decided on a LHD to acquire technologies and build experience because an LHD is a multi-mission ship, one that can be used for numerous roles. This capability makes it easier for the Russian Navy to find missions for it, rather than adapt existing types to a specific mission.

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167 Vladimir Shcherbakov, “Reduction and Disbandment to Boot. Black Berets Will have to Fight in the Old Fashioned Manner in the 21st Century. the Russian Naval Infantry Will Celebrate its Anniversary on 27 November,” *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, November 27, 2009.

168 Ibid.

## K. GENERAL PLACEMENT OF RUSSIAN *MISTRALS*

One idea regarding placement is that because there are four ships to be bought/built, each fleet will get one ship. However, First Deputy Chief of the Russian Navy's Main Staff Vice Admiral Oleg Burtsev has said that the navy plans to base the *Mistral*, not in the Baltic or Black Sea Fleets, but rather in the Northern and Pacific Fleets.<sup>169</sup> Two will go to the Northern Fleet and two, including the first one or two, will go to the Pacific Fleet.<sup>170</sup> From a capability perspective, this makes more sense. If Russia is looking to show the flag or project power overseas, it will have to use its sole aircraft carrier, the *Admiral Kuznetsov* or one of its new *Mistrals*. And with the *Kuznetsov* possibly out of the picture till 2017, the *Mistral* becomes the sole aviation asset for the fleet. The *Mistral* also could perform important humanitarian relief operations in crisis situations or be part of the global efforts against pirates off the coast of Somalia. All these roles will require warships to be readily available at short notice. A general rule is to project power anytime, a minimum of three battle groups centered on either an aircraft or helicopter carrier would be required.<sup>171</sup> Most importantly, placing two vessels in the Northern and Pacific fleet would increase the probability of having at least one warship available in time of need. Furthermore, by keeping two ships together, one has a much more powerful amphibious strike force. In any case, the *Mistrals* could also move from fleet to fleet, albeit slowly. As mentioned earlier, the *Mistral's* highest possible speed is only 19 knots and its max range cruising speed is 15 knots.<sup>172</sup> So while ships could move from fleet to fleet easily for planned exercises or deployments, for rapid reactions to crises the ships would already need to be close to the action. Both the Northern Fleet and Pacific Fleet have vast areas to cover. Stationing two ships in each

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169 Igor Chubakha, "Mistral Will Defend the Russian Arctic," *Rosbalt*, November 23, 2009.

170 Pavel Kharkov, "Fokino Will Become the Main Base for the Pacific Fleet and the Headquarters for the Pacific Fleet Will be Moved to Khabarovsk," *Progress Primorya*, July 8, 2010.

171 This is under the assumption that one LHD is being serviced, one LHD is on a training mission and a third is available for deployment. - Margarete Klein, *Russia's Military Capabilities "Great Power" Ambitions and Reality* (Berlin, Germany: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik,[2009]), 19.

172 Here is a breakdown of very approximate minimum times it would take a *Mistral* at either 19 or 15 knots to travel from the various fleets. Northern Fleet to Baltic Fleet (2200 km) – 5 / 6 days; Black Sea Fleet to Baltic Sea Fleet (4500 km) – 10 / 13 days; Pacific Fleet to Northern Fleet via Northern Sea Route (5600 km) – 13 / 16 days; Pacific Fleet to Black Sea Fleet (8400 km) – 19–23 days.

area, especially with the overall slower speed would give better odds on having one *Mistral* possible close to where it is needed. This time required reposition ships means that homeporting ships in the Baltic or Black Seas is unlikely. Also, from an infrastructure standpoint, as Russia will have to build new port facilities for *Mistrals*, it would be cheaper to only build new facilities at two locations rather than all four.

## 1. Pacific Fleet

Many believe the *Mistrals* are going to the Pacific fleet first because of the Kuril Island issues. As Vladimir Popovkin<sup>173</sup> has said, Russia has "...an issue with the islands in the Far East that remains unresolved from Japan's point of view, though from our perspective everything is settled."<sup>174</sup> General Makarov has also stated that, because Russia has no soldiers in Kuril Islands now, it needs a mobile means of moving troops there if necessary. This is inaccurate as the Kuril Islands are currently home to the only remaining division in the Russian army, the 18<sup>th</sup> Artillery division, a second-tier unit with reportedly outdated equipment. For General Makarov the *Mistral* is the best option as it is larger than any such ships owned by the Russian Navy to transport troops.<sup>175</sup>

So if the *Mistral's* purpose is primarily to move troops from Vladivostok to the Kuril Islands, are there better options, or is the *Mistral* really the best fit? Even though Russia retains a large airlift capability,<sup>176</sup> the disputed Kuril Islands do not possess runways of significant length to land large transport aircraft,<sup>177</sup> or even airports that can operate year round.<sup>178</sup> Airlifting troops year round is not a viable option due to the weather conditions sometimes found in the Kurils. The Russian Pacific Fleet has four

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173 He was the deputy defense minister in charge of armaments until May 2011.

174 Ivan Konovalov, "Mistral is Response to Japan on Eternal Kuriles Issue," *Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press*, the 062, no. 14, April 5, 2010, 16.

175 "Russia Needs Mistral-Class Ships," *Interfax-AVN*, June 8, 2010.

176 Russia possesses 298 transport aircraft of various sizes as of March 2011. *Chapter Five: Russia*, 188.

177 Pavel Felgenhauer, "The Kurile Islands: A Key to Russia's Maritime Nuclear Strategy," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 7, no. 200 (November 4, 2010).

178 Sergei Blagov, "Russia Moves to Develop and Repopulate the Kuril Islands," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 3, no. 152 (August 7, 2006).

*Ropuchas*<sup>179</sup> which combined could transport up to 760 troops and 40 MBT or 96 vehicles between all four. Because the Russian Navy has planned on six *Ivan Grens* as well, it can be assumed that one or two may go to the Pacific Fleet. Two *Ivan Grens* could transport 600 troops and 26 MBT or 72 vehicles. Both the *Ivan Gren* and *Mistral* would be far more fuel efficient than the current *Ropuchas* which General Makarov claims burn 3-4 times as much fuel as a *Mistral* would.<sup>180</sup> Looking at straight transport capability, a single *Mistral* could carry 900 troops and 13 MBT or 70 vehicles. If no helicopters were carried, a total of 230 vehicles could be carried.<sup>181</sup> So from a transportation aspect, the *Mistral* seems to be an excellent asset to use as it can carry as much in one trip that would require multiple *Ropuchas* or *Ivan Gren* vessels. One drawback may be that the *Mistral* would be forced either to offload slowly using landing craft, or it would have to use the extremely limited port facilities in the Kuril Islands. To offload tanks and vehicles pier side, the *Mistral* requires a large enough pier to moor against to allow the vehicles to roll off from its second deck via a ramp. *Ivan Grens* and *Ropuchas* would be able to off load their cargos without the use of an established port facility, instead directly offloading onto shorelines. The helicopter capability of the *Mistral* would likely be wasted in a simple reinforcement mission, as the *Ivan Grens* could carry one or two helicopters to ferry troops around. Also, the Ka-29 helicopters are not capable of carrying large external loads, such as vehicles. The five *Ivan Grens* are estimated at 325 million dollars per ship<sup>182</sup>, while some estimates put a single *Mistral* to be estimated at 750 million dollars, without the helicopters.<sup>183</sup> This price is currently subject to negotiations as well, but the point is the *Ivan Grens* are far cheaper than a *Mistral*. So in a reinforcement operation to the Kuril Islands, building more *Ivan Grens* may be more cost effective than using a *Mistral* or two for simple troop transportation if troop

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179 The one *Ivan Rogov* will be discounted as it is doubted to be operational.

180 "France to Discuss Sale of Mistral Ships to Russia at Euronaval 2010," *ITAR-TASS*, October 25, 2010.

181 Manseck, *BPC "Mistral" Class*, 90.

182 "Russia Defence Budget," Jane's Defence Budgets, [http://search.janes.com.libproxy.nps.edu/Search/documentView.do?docId=/content1/janesdata/binder/jdb/db\\_a034.htm@current&pageSelected=allJanes&keyword=ivan gren cost&backPath=http://search.janes.com/Search&Prod\\_Name=JDB&](http://search.janes.com.libproxy.nps.edu/Search/documentView.do?docId=/content1/janesdata/binder/jdb/db_a034.htm@current&pageSelected=allJanes&keyword=ivan gren cost&backPath=http://search.janes.com/Search&Prod_Name=JDB&) (accessed December 14, 2009).

183 Chubakha, *Mistral Will Defend the Russian Arctic; Russia Defence Budget*.

reinforcement is really the primary mission set. As Russia has focused on the *Mistral* over additional *Ivan Grens*, it could be inferred that the troop transportation is merely a nice to have capability, not a pressing need.

The likelihood of a combat assault against an opposed shoreline of either Japan or China, while again not an optimal task for a *Mistral* unsupported by escort ships, is extremely unlikely. An important consideration may be though that the Russian Navy is looking at the age of its *Alligators* and *Ropuchas* in the Pacific Fleet. The newest *Ropucha* was commissioned in 1986, while the oldest dates from 1975.<sup>184</sup> While these vessels are still currently operational, by the time the first two *Mistrals* enter Russian service (assuming 2014–2015 time frame), some *Ropuchas* will be reaching the end of their service lives (40+ years for some). By adding transport capable warships sooner rather than later, this may indicate that Russia is attempting to get ahead of impending ship retirements. By avoiding the need to try and prolong service life, Russia can count on two new warships to take the place of retiring *Ropuchas*. In summary, two *Mistrals* added to the Russian Pacific Fleet would give it more sealift and sustainment capabilities than it currently possess, or could be a suitable replacement for retiring transports. However, the *Mistral* would not bring a significant combat capability in terms of a serious amphibious assault capability to either Japan or China however. It is also not the most cost-effective platform if the desired mission was simply to move troops by sea.

Russia desires the ability to reinforce the Kuril Islands for multiple reasons. The main one is that the ownership of the southern four islands is disputed with Japan. The second reason is that for Russia, the Kuril Islands provide access to valuable fisheries, holdings to significant mineral deposits and could hold new natural gas and oil discoveries.

The possession of the islands also provides a military-strategic value. By holding all the islands, the Russians can control the access to the Sea of Okhotsk. In an extreme situation, for example the Russians could mine the straits between the Kuril Islands and

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184 Wertheim, *Naval Institute Guide to Combat Fleets of the World*, 633.

isolate the Sea of Okhotsk.<sup>185</sup> This sealed off sea would provide Russian ballistic missile submarines an area to safely to operate from. More realistically, the possession of the southern four islands allows the Russians a measure of control of the Sea of Okhotsk. But this is via forces on the islands, not the *Mistrals*. *Mistrals* would serve little purpose in actively denying access to the Sea of Okhotsk to surface or air units. In their unarmored state, they would be easy targets for an opposing navy. Claims that the *Mistrals* are needed in the Pacific Fleet to protect the extended supply lines from Kamchatka to the Kurils are also a stretch.<sup>186</sup> The *Mistral* cannot protect itself from surface or aviation threats, much less protect supply lines. The *Mistral* has some offensive capability in the littoral regions with its attack helicopters, and some limited anti-ship capability with Ka-52MD and AS-20 KAYAK missiles. However, against a modern surface warship with advanced surface to air missiles (as both the Chinese and Japanese have), it is unlikely that a *Mistral's* helicopters could get close enough without assistance from other Russian naval and air force assets. More realistically, the more significant offensive or protective capability the *Mistrals* could provide would be that of an anti-submarine platform. The *Mistral* could carry more Ka-27PL ASW helicopters than multiple other surface combatants. These ASW helicopters could cover a large area being based off a *Mistral*. However, to be effective, the *Mistral* would still require escorts for self defense and prosecution of submarines. The other tactical use for a *Mistral* in the open ocean would be to use its helicopters for over the horizon targeting for other warships. Also in this role, the Ka-31 Airborne Early Warning (AEW) helicopters could be used. Yet again the Ka-31 and Ka-27PL could operate from other Russian warships as well. So a *Mistral* by itself could not greatly affect the situation in the Kurils. Where the *Mistral* could become effective in a combat role is when it is supported by other escort warships and aircraft. Again, while there are reasons for protecting the Kuril Islands, there are few direct military reasons calling specifically for a LHD.

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185 Felgenhauer, *The Kurile Islands: A Key to Russia's Maritime Nuclear Strategy*.

186 "The Kurils Will be Getting New Helicopters and Air Defense Systems," *Infox.Ru*, March 1, 2011.

The *Mistrals* do fit into Russia's strategic focus on the Far East. The Russian press has reported that the defense forces on the islands, the 18<sup>th</sup> Artillery division, would be unable to defend the islands for more than one or two days without significant support from the rest of the Russian military forces.<sup>187</sup> Again, while the *Mistral* could aid in transporting reinforcements, the Pacific fleet already has sealift assets. With the discussions to bring attack helicopters to the island, a mobile helicopter carrier that needs to be escorted loses value in protecting fixed assets. Recently the Russians have made statements and described intentions to build up their defenses in the Kuril Islands. Some of these improvements include mentions of Tor M2 air defense systems (SA-15 GAUNTLET) and Mi-28N Night Hunter helicopters being stationed on the larger islands of Iturup and Kunashir.<sup>188</sup> Also mentioned by sources on the Russian General Staff was the possibility of a S-400 *Triumf* (SA-21 GROWLER) system deployment.<sup>189</sup> The fact that Russia only has two operational S-400 battalions as of March 2011 seems to indicate that it would be highly unlikely that such an advanced and long-range system would be deployed to the Kurils. Still even the mention of such an advanced system may indicate the priority that Russia places on the Kuril Islands. Or the mentioning of such advanced weapon systems serves as an indication to China and Japan that Russian interests in the Far East will be protected.

On the surface the Russians are claiming that the buildup is to protect Russia's sovereignty in the Far East. Following the Russian-Japanese diplomatic fall out in January 2011, after President Medvedev's visit to Kunashir Island, both sides have increased their rhetoric about ownership of the islands. While there is some value to modernizing defenses, especially in disputed territories, it is not likely that the Japanese threat is the primary reason. Russia is concerned with the potential threat of rising Chinese power on their border. Russia has been very keen to not directly mention this Chinese threat, as seen during the Russian Far East exercise, *Vostok-10*, in which Russia

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187 Sergei Balmasov, "Will Russia be Able to Defend Kuril Island if Japan Attacks?" *Pravda.Ru*, February 9, 2011.

188 *Infox.Ru*, "The Kurils Will be Getting New Helicopters and Air Defense Systems."

189 "Russia to Deploy Modern Missile Defense Systems on Disputed Kuril Islands," *RIA Novosti*, February 15, 2011.

made specifically mentioned that the exercise was not directed at China.<sup>190</sup> This was in spite of the fact that the exercise's opposing forces had armored units and aviation assets—far more than expected of groups of terrorists, which were the notional enemy. Doing so would potentially jeopardize ongoing arms sales, especially the new sales announced in November 2010.<sup>191</sup> It could also raise tensions, and Russia needs Chinese oil and gas purchases. Instead of publicly admitting a focus on China, Russia can “bash” Japan for free, or at a significantly lower political price. Statements about protecting Russian lands against the Japanese claims also go over well in the domestic arena. With upcoming elections in 2012 for the Russian Presidency, President Medvedev can toughen his foreign policy credentials with domestic voters by confronting the Japanese vice risking more important relationships with China, NATO or the US.<sup>192</sup>

The Russian Navy has begun to shift their focus of effort to the Pacific Fleet. The point is not currently the actual war fighting capability in a true high intensity conflict. Rather it is simply the Russian naval presence and the ability to show other countries that the Russian Navy has not given up the Pacific to the US and China. Some examples are the recent announced plans where Russia's newest SSBN, the *Yuri Dolgorukiy* (*Borei* class) will be stationed at Petropavlosk-Kamchatski in the Pacific Fleet. This is unusual as normally lead SSBNs have been stationed in the Northern fleet closer to their builder, Sevmash, in order to facilitate service and support.<sup>193</sup> There have also been rumors of a possible movement of Northern Fleet's *Marshal Ustinov* (*Slava* class, Project 1164) from the Northern Fleet to Pacific Fleet.<sup>194</sup> The *Marshal Ustinov* would join its sister ship, the *Varyag*, giving the Russians two *Slava* class cruisers out of the three active cruisers in the Pacific Fleet. The *Mistrals* would fit in as another capital warship to show Russian

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190 Roger N. McDermott, “Reflections on Vostok 2010 - Selling an Image,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 7, no. 134 (July 13, 2010).

191 Stephen J. Blank, “Turning a New Leaf in Relations: Russia's Renewed Arms Sale to China,” *China Brief* 11, no. 2 (January 28, 2011).

192 Richard Weitz, “Global Insight: Why Russia is Challenging Japan Over the Kurils,” *World Politics Review*, [www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/print/8038](http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/print/8038) (accessed March 8, 2011).

193 Russian Defense Policy, *Yuriy Dolgorukiy Headed for Pacific Fleet*. February 27, 2011. <http://russiandefpolicy.wordpress.com/2011/02/27/yuriy-dolgorukiy-headed-for-pacific-fleet/>.

194 “Russia Mulls Missile Cruiser's Redeployment from North to Pacific,” *RIA-Novosti*, March 27, 2011.



presence and power projection in the Pacific. Focusing on building up forces in the Pacific also aids the Russians in potentially overseeing the Chinese efforts to explore the Arctic. China has been making efforts to explore the Arctic with its own icebreakers, and has indicated that it will continue to push, albeit quietly and unobtrusively, to have the Arctic available to all nations, not just the Arctic ones.<sup>195</sup> As the Chinese shipping lanes to the Arctic would pass through the Russian Pacific Fleets area of responsibility, increasing Russian naval presence could continue to impress upon the Chinese their concern. Again though, the *Mistral* fits into this large picture by being a symbol of Russian power projection, a modern day version of “gun boat” diplomacy. The *Mistrals* themselves do not significantly impact the balance of military forces in the region.

## 2. Baltic Fleet

The reinforcement of the Kaliningrad region mission is another reason that Vladimir Popovkin has identified to purchase the *Mistral*.<sup>196</sup> Once again, many of the same considerations discussed in reinforcing the Kuril Islands area are applicable in reinforcing the Kaliningrad region. Again, the *Mistral* does provide a significant transportation capability, yet the *Ivan Grens* should be able to handle much of the responsibility as well. The likelihood of Russia needing to rapidly reinforce the Kaliningrad region is also very remote. Another point to reiterate is that the *Mistral* has a maximum speed of 19 knots, the same speed as the navy’s current *Ivan Gren*, *Ropucha* and *Alligator* classes. So the *Mistral* will not get heavy equipment to a location quicker. The only major advantage that the *Mistral* has is that it can carry more troops and by using helicopters could offload them faster and to more dispersed locations. Again it is a unique capability, but not one that the Kaliningrad region needs.

Also, from a European perspective, stationing *Mistral* warships in the Kaliningrad region is far more provocative than placing warships in the Far East. Doing this would likely cause significant criticism of France from the Baltic nations and other NATO members. As it is in Russia’s best interest to keep France on its side (for future possible

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<sup>195</sup> Joseph Spears, “The Snow Dragon Moves into the Arctic Ocean Basin,” *China Brief* 11, no. 2 (January 28, 2011).

<sup>196</sup> Konovalov, *Mistral is Response to Japan on Eternal Kuriles Issue*, 16.

sales, as well as service life support of the *Mistrals*), it is highly unlikely that Russia would be willing to put France in such a position.

### 3. Northern Fleet

Just because official Russian statements place the *Mistral* in the Northern Fleet and the Russians have requested cold weather modifications to the *Mistrals*, does not mean Russia is looking to further militarize the Arctic. The most likely reason for the cold weather and hull modifications are because operating in the Northern Fleet ships will often encounter ice frequently throughout the winter months. Simple ice protection will allow the reduction of risk of the *Mistrals* being damaged by ice. One stated mission of the *Mistral* would be to perform search and rescue operations in the far North.<sup>197</sup> When one considers the shrinking ice cap in the arctic will allow for more ship traffic on the Northern Sea Route, this idea makes some sense. Russia has also admitted to having a shortage of rescue ships to patrol the far north. In December 2010, Vice Premier Sergei Ivanov explained that because over 70% of Russian search and rescue vessels were in dire need of yard repair or modernization, it was actually easier to hire foreigners for search and rescue missions vice relying on Russian search and rescue vessels and helicopters.<sup>198</sup> For a country hoping to have a strong say in the Arctic, Russia cannot be seen to depend on foreign assistance. A *Mistral* with multiple Ka-27PS rescue helicopters would be able to cover a significant area in the Arctic. Nonetheless, the *Mistral* may not be the most cost effective warship for rescue missions. It also highly inconceivable that Russia would be looking to land troops on Norwegian or Swedish soil. Another unlikely mission that the *Mistral* could fulfill in the Far North would be to conduct resupply missions to the numerous Russian military and scientific outposts in the Arctic and along the northern coast. Stationing a *Mistral* in the Northern Fleet again gives the Russian Navy a capital ship to demonstrate national interests or concerns. As more countries look to explore the Arctic and take advantage of the possible resources, Russia wants to appear strong and capable of protecting its territory and interests in the

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197 Pierre Avril, "Russian Navy Covets the Mistral," *LeFigaro.Fr*, November 27, 2009.

198 "70% of Russian Search and Rescue Vessels Need Repair," RusNavy.com, [http://rusnavy.com/news/navy/index.php?ELEMENT\\_ID=11187](http://rusnavy.com/news/navy/index.php?ELEMENT_ID=11187) (accessed December 27, 2010).

region. From the Northern Fleet a *Mistral* could also be used for various port visits as well as sail down through the Mediterranean and support anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden. So while *Mistral* could be well utilized, there is no one major pressing need for an LHD in the Northern Fleet.

#### 4. Black Sea Fleet

Some analysts have postulated that the *Mistral* will be going to the Black Sea Fleet primarily to threaten Georgia again. Georgia is realistically the only country that Russia could threaten in the Black Sea. Turkey is far more of a naval power than Russia in that region, plus Turkey controls the Bosphorus Straits and the Dardanelles for entry into the Black Sea. The *Mistral* does not fall under to the Montreux Convention<sup>199</sup>, but Turkey could make it difficult for an aviation warship to pass in and out, so Russia may just well elect to keep a *Mistral* out of the Black Sea. The other countries in the Black Sea are also all NATO members. As Prime Minister Putin has bluntly said, Russia would not need the *Mistral* to invade Georgia again; Russia's army is perfectly capable of executing that task.<sup>200</sup> As there are already Russian bases in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, air support from the *Mistral* would likely not be needed. One comment was that the *Mistral* could rapidly reinforce Georgia in the winter months, when snow and ice would constrain supply movement through the Caucasus and Roki tunnel.<sup>201</sup> Once again, other LSTs of the Black Sea Fleet could do this, or Russia could use its airlift capability. A point that Aleksandr Goltz brought up is that the Russians have left tanks and artillery pieces behind in occupied territories to diminish the reliance on moving equipment through the Roki Tunnel, which Georgia would surely try to close in a future conflict.<sup>202</sup>

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199 The Montreux Convention, signed in 1936, gives Turkey control of the straits and restricts non-Turkish military vessels and prohibits some types of warships, such as aircraft carriers, from transiting the straits. As a helicopter carrier with no fixed wing aviation capability, the *Mistral* is not classified as an aircraft carrier.

200 Vladimir Socor, "Moscow Keeps Paris on Edge Over the Mistral Affair," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 7, no. 113 (June 11, 2010).

201 Michael Cecire, "Russian Mistral Purchase Leaves Neighbors Wary," *World Politics Review* (April 15, 2010).

202 Timothy L. Thomas, "The Bear Went through the Mountain: Russia Appraises its Five-Day War in South Ossetia," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 22 (2009), 44.

So it seems the importance of equipment movement may be minimized by planning ahead, however troop reinforcement could be done fastest by aircraft.

The one significant benefit a *Mistral* would bring to the Black Sea fleet would be its command and control capability in a large-scale land operation in Georgia again. However, as Russia accomplished its goals in 2008, it seems unlikely that Russia would again resort to a large-scale invasion, one needing sophisticated command capabilities. And if they did, they could always move a ship into the Black Sea.

There was one other argument made for the need of a *Mistral* or two in the Black Sea Fleet. In early 2010, it was suggested that the Russians wanted *Mistrals* by 2017, which was the deadline for the Black Sea Fleet to leave Sevastopol in the Crimea.<sup>203</sup> This was another extreme viewpoint that the Russian Navy would need amphibious warships to protect Sevastopol. However, in April 2010, Russia and Ukraine agreed to extend the Russian lease on Sevastopol for another 25 years, plus another five-year option, bringing the new expiration date of 2047.<sup>204</sup> This new agreement seems to remove any rational military reason for needing to reinforce Sevastopol. Russia is still more powerful than Ukraine and is not in danger of being forced out of Sevastopol anytime soon.

So, while arguments can be made in every fleet that a *Mistral* could play an important role, the argument that the *Mistral* would fill a current, glaring combat capability gap is not valid for any fleet. Nor is the *Mistral* vital to the successful completion of likely missions. Rather the *Mistral* would augment or improve general naval capabilities. This reinforces the idea that the capabilities are not the primary reason behind the purchase of the ship. The Russian Navy does not need the *Mistral* as a troop transport, as it has this capability covered. Gaps do exist in Russian naval capabilities concerning helicopter assault and support as well as warships performing the command vessel function. However none of these capabilities are crucially required for the current

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<sup>203</sup> Pavel Felgenhauer, "France Fears the Loss of Mistral Sale," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 7, no. 43 (March 4, 2009).

<sup>204</sup> Vladimir Socor, "Russian Black Sea Fleet Strengthens Presence in Ukraine," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 8, no. 15 (January, 2011).

and probable future missions of the Russian Navy. All the missions covered in the various areas merely emphasize how the Russian Navy is finding missions for the *Mistral* to fill. This multi-mission ability is also why of all the avenues to choose for technology procurement, a LHD has the most flexibility in terms of the full range of military operations.

One important consideration must be kept in mind when discussing Russian stated intentions and basing locations. Saying that the Russian Navy will use the *Mistrals* for command and control and humanitarian missions is far less unsettling to other countries than a statement declaring the primary use of such a warship would be amphibious assault. The same argument holds true for basing locations, the Pacific is far less concerning for European countries than the Baltic or Black Sea. While it may not be used in an amphibious assault role, it has the capability. Plus, ships can move. Lastly, these ships are not going to enter service at least until 2014-2015 timeframe. Why would Russia want to antagonize European countries now with threatening statements and basing locations? Much can happen between the construction of the ships and their final primary missions and basing locations. By focusing on the other missions than direct combat, the Russians also make it easier for France to supply advanced technologies that Russia desires. If Russia had made statements saying this warship would help it control Estonia, it would be much less likely for NATO and world opinion to allow France to sell fully equipped warships. Staying with non-threatening statements works in both Russia's and France's favor. As Russia will get not only the ships but also the associated technology and knowledge, while France will get to produce warships, keeping shipbuilders in France employed.

#### **L. RUSSIAN NAVAL INFRASTRUCTURE**

The Soviet Union seemed never to be able to maintain its large capital warships to the point where their service life was as long as western equivalent units. The Soviets spent more time and effort in building ships and submarines than the proper infrastructure to support them. Russia has inherited this mindset from the Soviet Union. Soviet built project 1123 helicopter and 1143 aircraft carriers (*Moskva, Leningrad, Kiev and Minsk*)

all never had proper base support and “merely bobbed at anchor before being sold for scrap.”<sup>205</sup> The *Kiev* and *Minsk* were only in service for 15 years but reportedly in poor material condition in 1991. It seems though at last Russian officials, such as Deputy Defense Minister Popovkin, realize that Russia does not have the proper port facilities to support a *Mistral* class warship. If the sale is approved, he has stated that Russia recognizes that it will have to build the proper port facilities.<sup>206</sup>

The French shipbuilder, DCNS has also been approached about potentially constructing naval bases for the vessels.<sup>207</sup> Proper concern has also been raised about how Russia will repair French equipment and will there be long lasting French support?<sup>208</sup> Another worry growing now is besides the fact the proper infrastructure does not exist, but also are the costs being properly considered. As Oleg Tretiakov of the Russian Defense Ministry’s 1<sup>st</sup> Research Institute recently explained, the life cycle costs of Russian weapon systems themselves are often underestimated. In the long term, these costs end up reducing operational effectiveness because necessary repairs and maintenance are often forsaken due to a lack of funds for upkeep.<sup>209</sup> As Admiral Igor Kasatonov, a former deputy commander in chief of the Russian Navy, says, “you cannot just buy a ship, and that’s all!”<sup>210</sup>

India bought the aircraft carrier *Admiral Gorshokov* to be converted into a full deck aircraft carrier by the Russian shipbuilding company Sevmash. The ship purchase was followed by contracts for MiG-29Ks to equip the airwing, followed by contracts for onshore service infrastructure and programs to train the Indian crew to operate and repair the ship. The initial contract was for one billion dollars, but additional costs (and

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205 Litovkin, *Mistral – For and Against*.

206 “Russia to Build Port Facilities for Mistral Ships,” *RIA-Novosti*, April 8, 2010.

207 “France’s “Mistral” Deal with Russia Reportedly Involves Bases,” *Intelligence Online*, August 26, 2010.

208 “OPK’s Inability to Manufacture Quality Weapons is the Result of the Flawed State Order System,” *Novaya Politika*, December 9, 2010.

209 “Competitiveness of Russian Arms can be Raised by Reducing their Operational Costs – Defense Expert,” ARMS-TASS, April 4, 2011.

[http://rusnavy.com/news/navy/index.php?ELEMENT\\_ID=11934&print=Y](http://rusnavy.com/news/navy/index.php?ELEMENT_ID=11934&print=Y).

210 Dmitriy Litovkin, “Mistral Raises Wave on Neva,” *Izvestiya*, November 29, 2009.

production overruns) have cost India another three billion dollars.<sup>211</sup> The worry is the same thing may happen with the Russian purchase of the *Mistrals*. As it stands currently, the GPV 2011-2020 that was submitted to Prime Minister Putin before going to President Medvedev on 14 December contained five trillion rubles for the navy.<sup>212</sup> While the construction of *Mistrals* is included in this sum, unmentioned is any funding for the new shore facilities or training.

In March 2011, there seemed to be a setback in the contract negotiations between France and Russia. The disagreement centered on the price of the vessels. The disagreement centered over the French offered prices, which were 1.15 billion euros for the first two ships (vice the Russian desire for the first two ships to be only 980 million euros), an additional 131 million euros for logistic expenses and 39 million euros for crew training.<sup>213</sup> It seems the Russians were indeed asking for training and documentation. While it is unlikely that the disagreements would completely derail the sale, it is an important point to see that the Russians have seemed to give some thought to proper support for the life cycle of the ship. As opposed to simply buying a ship, and then worrying about support and documentation later. Furthering this point was Defense Minister Serdyukov who stated that “Russia is interested in two ships on which the French would be under formal obligation to provide post-sales servicing.”<sup>214</sup> For now, Russia at least seems to be saying the right things to properly take care of the ship for its service life.

Another concern that has been brought up was by Vladislav Nikolskiy, a naval expert who holds the degree of Doctor of the Technical Sciences. In his view, the pod propulsion units of the *Mistral* will require frequent inspections, including dry docking.<sup>215</sup> His viewpoint is that there exists a shortage of dry docks that can accommodate a vessel of the *Mistral*'s size in Russia. To inspect and repair the azipod

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211 Litovkin, *Mistral Raises Wave on Neva*.

212 Aleksey Nikolskiy, “Putin's Fear,” *Vedomosti Online*, December 14, 2010.

213 “Russia Ready to Pay 1.5 Bln Euros for Mistral Contract - Defense Ministry,” *RIA Novosti*, March 3, 2011.

214 “Warship Deal with Russia Losing Support in France - Paper,” *RIA Novosti*, March 16, 2011.

215 Khorunzhiy, *Russia: Ministry of Defense Will Probably Buy Helicopter Carriers from France*.

propulsions system of the *Mistrals*, the ships need to be drydocked, as shown here in Figure 19, with the *Mistral* and *Tonnerre* in drydock.



Figure 19. BPC *Mistral* and *Tonnerre* at the Vauban Shipyard in Toulon (From Jean-Louis Venne, 2009)

As has been discussed, most of the shipyards in Russia use building ways or slipways to construct ships. These cannot be used to repair a ship, unless the ship can be winched back up the sloping ramp for repair—practically impossible for larger vessels. Therefore, to gain access to the hull and the azipod systems, either a graving dock or a floating drydock would be required. Table 4 outlines what type of permanent facilities the major Russian shipyards have.



Table 4. Graving and Drydock capabilities at major Russian Shipyards

	Sevmash	Baltiysky Zavod	Admiralty Shipyards	Far East Plant Zvezda	Severnaya verf	Yantar	Amur Shipyard
Graving dock size	159m x 325m	None	None	140m x 18m	360m x 55m*	None	None
Floating drydocks	None	None	92m x 27m	None	169m x 29m	150m x 29m	None
* - According to OPK, this drydock is currently under construction <sup>216</sup>							

Upon first glance, it seems that the only place a *Mistral* vessel could be drydocked would be Sevmash. This could present a significant problem in overhauling and inspecting Russian *Mistrals*. However, Russia has also made significant use of floating drydocks at their fleet repair facilities. As of 2007, Russia had at least five floating drydocks capable of servicing a *Mistral* sized vessel.<sup>217</sup> One, a PD-50 class floating drydock, is located near the repair facility at Roslyakovo, near Severmorsk. This floating drydock is large enough to accommodate the *Admiral Kuznetsov*, which has a length of 270 meters and a beam of 37 meters at the waterline, both significantly greater than the *Mistral* (see Figures 20 and 21). Two more large floating drydocks are also located near Murmansk. In the Far East there is one PD-81 class floating drydock outside the Chazhma Ship repair facility. In the Black Sea area, the Novorossiysk Shipyard also has a PD-41 class floating drydock.

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216 “New Shipbuilding Complex,” United Industrial Corporation, [http://eng.opk.ru/shipbuilding/new\\_complex/](http://eng.opk.ru/shipbuilding/new_complex/).

217 The specifics on the five Russian largest floating dry docks are: 1 PD-50 class (330x67 meters, max weight 80,000 tons), 1 PD-41 class (305x67 meters, max weight 80,000 tons), 2 PD-81 class (250x38 meters, max weight 29,300 tons) and 1 Project 2121 (199x42 meters, max weight 25,000 tons). Wertheim, *Naval Institute Guide to Combat Fleets of the World*, 658–659.



Figure 20. *Admiral Kuznetsov* inside the PD-50 floating drydock (From Pieter Inpyn, 2010)



Figure 21. *Admiral Kuznetsov* inside the PD-50 floating drydock (From Pieter Inpyn, 2010)

So, in quickly looking at repair capabilities, Russia has at least one repair asset in each major fleet, save the Baltic fleet. Yet as the third and fourth *Mistrals* are to be constructed in St Petersburg, it would not be a lengthy journey to the new shipyard and facilities on Kotlin Island. The new drydock under construction at the Severnya Verf shipyard is also easily capable of accommodating a *Mistral* when it is completed. The argument whether or not Russia has the capabilities to perform major service on a *Mistral* is settled—Russia does have the capability. What Russia will have to do is build new piers to support the *Mistrals* in areas where they are stationed. The most important factor is, while the Russians may have the capability, it remains to be seen if the Russian Navy spends the money, time and effort necessary to keep the *Mistrals* in a highly serviceable condition.

## **M. CONCLUSION**

This thesis has argued that there are a multitude of possible reasons for the Russians to buy four *Mistral* warships from France. All of the reasons point to the same conclusions: No specific analysis or capability review was carried out to determine which capabilities were required by the Russian Navy and how to fill them. Rather, the *Mistral* purchase was indicative of a particular system acquisition, vice one based on a set of needed capabilities. Even though the Russians put out an international tender for various warships, the fact this was done after France and Russia had entered into exclusive negotiations meant that the tender was done for show and legality purposes only. Once the system was identified, the Russians developed roles and capabilities for it, not the other way around. The *Mistral* was the Russian's choice because it gave them the most technology possible, potential helicopter contracts to Kamov, and a vast amount of support to the defense industry to modernize. The actual capabilities of the *Mistral*, while adding to Russian capabilities, do not instantly strengthen Russia as a naval combat power. And while the capabilities gained offer a nice side benefit, they are not desperately required. Speaking on the details of the *Mistral* negotiations Anatoly Isaikin,

the director general of Rosoboronexport<sup>218</sup> said: “When hundreds of millions are at stake, such contracts need years of negotiations. It is ridiculous to expect that we would close such contract within several months.”<sup>219</sup> Later comments from Defense Minister Serdyukov indicated a reluctance to place a timeframe on the contract negotiations, rather saying that “[the *Mistral* contract] would be signed when it was ready.”<sup>220</sup> These statements seem to indicate that the priorities of the Russians are to get the technologies, building licenses and technical documentation for the right price. If Russia truly had a pressing need for LHD in the next few years, it would likely have accepted the higher price for a speedier construction timeline. This is not to say the navy’s goal of rapidly adding warships to its rolls is jeopardized greatly. Even if construction begins late in 2011 or even 2012, the Russian Navy will still get at least a few *Mistrals* faster from France than if it had to wait for domestically built LHDs.

If Russia had truly looked hard at what missions it requires from its navy, an amphibious assault helicopter carrier would not be at the top of the list to fill the required missions. As Pukhov writes,

When [Russia] can’t build the necessary number of corvettes and frigates, let alone destroyers, throwing away several hundred million euros on an obvious luxury item is like living in a hovel and buying a Bentley and parking it in the yard together with old bangers. This is an obvious attempt by a pauper to buy a luxury item.”<sup>221</sup>

There is one conclusion that can also be gleaned from the selection of an LHD however. That is that Russia is moving away from ships designed solely for a primary mission in a high intensity conflict and is focusing on lower intensity warships, capable of multiple missions.

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218 Rosoboronexport is the Russian state run company who is in charge of all military and dual use sales for both import and export. Rosoboronexport is handling the *Mistral* contract negotiations with the French company DCNS.

219 “*Mistral* Contract Won't be Signed in the Short Run - Rosoboronexport,” *Interfax-AVN*, March 15, 2011. [http://rusnavy.com/news/navy/index.php?ELEMENT\\_ID=11732](http://rusnavy.com/news/navy/index.php?ELEMENT_ID=11732).

220 *RIA Novosti*, “Warship Deal with Russia Losing Support in France - Paper.”

221 “Pundits Doubt Russian Navy Needs French-Built Warship,” *Center TV International*, March 6, 2010.

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### **III. EFFECTS OF MISTRAL SALE ON NATO ALLIANCE**

#### **A. INTRODUCTION**

The military considerations and potential reasons behind the sale are not the only important ones. The fact that France, a NATO member, has agreed to sell the *Mistral* to Russia carries alliance implications. The *Mistral* sale marks the first major arms sale between Russia and a NATO member. What effects might the *Mistral* sale have on NATO's cohesion? What do reactions to this possible sale reveal about the fears and anxieties of certain NATO allies and security partners?

NATO's most serious internal crises have occurred when member nations have undertaken unilateral actions without consultation with allies or against their wishes. An alliance without a common purpose or effective coordination and consensus is in jeopardy. Simply put, today the fundamental problem is that the consensus on the common threat, which unified the alliance during the Cold War is no longer present.

#### **B. BALTIC AND POLISH CONCERNS**

The majority of the complaints concerning the *Mistral* sale have come from the Baltic nations, Poland and the United States. The arguments against the sale fall into two main categories: One holds that the *Mistral* sale ignores a history of Russian aggression towards its smaller neighbors, and may give Moscow the capability to intimidate them in the future—a concern that cannot be easily dismissed when pitched by the Baltic states or Poland who have been “sold out” by the West before. While NATO certainly possesses the capability to defend them, they question the West's will to do so and “honor their Article 5 commitments in a serious crisis.”<sup>222</sup> There have also been debates over how significant the threat posed by the *Mistral* class ships in the Russian Navy could actually be.

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<sup>222</sup> David S. Yost, “NATO's Evolving Purposes and the Next Strategic Concept,” *International Affairs* 86, no. 2 (2010), 498.

Lithuanian Member of the European Parliament (MEP) Vytautas Landsbergis<sup>223</sup> stated that the sale demonstrates conclusively that France is no longer Lithuania's ally, but instead has pitched its tent with Moscow. For him, the French have violated EU and NATO principles for money, or they have "lost their mind."<sup>224</sup> While Landsbergis' views are perhaps too harsh, he does represent the Baltic fear that France will not back them in a showdown with Russia.

In November 2009, when news of the French-Russia negotiations broke, Estonia was already closely following the sale. While Estonia did not criticize the sale at the time, Estonian Foreign Minister Urmas Paet immediately consulted with the French and referred discussion to the EU.<sup>225</sup> Latvia's Defense Minister, Imants Liegis, said that if the Russians deployed a *Mistral* class warship in the Baltic Sea, Latvia might have to revise "its effective defence plan in terms of military and national security threats."<sup>226</sup>

The Lithuanian ambassador to NATO, Linas Linkevicius, was not as concerned about a ship or two appearing in the Baltic Sea as were others, but rather the principle that the sale represents. After all, Russia has had amphibious warships docked in the port of Baltyisk for years and just recently conducted amphibious assaults as part of Zapad-09 and Vostok-10. While the *Mistral* class ships augment Russian maritime power, like others, Lithuania fears that the sale signals a potential fracturing of NATO resolve and that NATO allies might overlook potential Russian transgressions (or past transgressions such as Georgia) or Baltic security concerns in their pursuit of better NATO-Russia relations.

There is also a growing fear in Estonia and Lithuania that NATO allies may trample on Baltic concerns in their rush to close sales with the Russians. In February 2010, Lithuanian Defense Minister Rasa Juknevičienė discussed bringing up the sale at

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223 Vytautas Landsbergis is currently a Member of the European Parliament. He is best known for being at the forefront of Lithuania's independence movement from the Soviet Union and served as Lithuania's first head of state.

224 Vytautas Landsbergis, "France has Violated European Principles," *Alfa.Lt*, February 10, 2010.

225 "Estonia Following Possible Sale of Helicopter Carrier by France to Russia," *Interfax-AVN*, November 25, 2009.

226 "Latvia Worried by Moscow's Plans to Buy Mistral Ship from France," *ITAR-TASS*, December 9, 2009.

NATO, because of the expressed concern that the *Mistral* seemingly gives the green light for more such military arms sales regardless of the security concerns expressed by fellow allies.<sup>227</sup> The Netherlands and Spain have both been identified by an Estonian government source as eager to take advantage of the Russian market.<sup>228</sup> Both countries<sup>229</sup> competed with France for the Russian amphibious warship tender, and both are looking to create or save jobs in their countries. These countries had implied that “economic calculations and a chance to create jobs outweigh security concerns.”<sup>230</sup> So the Baltic states’ fear is that professions of NATO solidarity will evaporate in a crisis.

Estonian President Toomas Hendrik Ilves also takes issue with Secretary General Rasmussen’s idea that the arms sale is merely a bilateral issue between France and Russia. Why, then, do we have NATO if the priority is “only a collective issue when you’re attacked but otherwise it’s all nineteenth century selling whatever you can?”<sup>231</sup> Latvian MP Vaira Paegle shares his disdain of categorizing the sale as a bilateral issue because in her opinion, NATO has an obligation to ensure that all its member states feel “equally safe.”<sup>232</sup> The Baltic states want NATO to act consistently, and so remove doubts about their security. When NATO applies varied criteria to different situations, this deepens the Baltic concerns that NATO may not act decisively in a crisis.

This fear of major NATO allies picking and choosing how to deal with specific issues also frightened Poland. Jerzy Nowak, the former Polish ambassador to NATO, has spoken of Poland’s desire to “make certain that NATO is able to automatically respond as

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227 “France-Russia Warship Deal Marvel to Lithuania – Defense Minister,” *Baltic News Service*, February 9, 2010.

228 “Estonia Highlights Concern Over France-Russia Warship Plan,” *AFP (North European Service)*, February 11, 2010.

229 The Netherlands offered its *Johan de Witt* LPD and Spain offered its *Juan Carlos* LHD in response to the Russian tender.

230 *Ibid.*

231 Josh Rogin, “Who’s in Town? Toomas Hendrik Ilves, the “Dean of the Balts,”” *The Cable*, <http://www.president.ee/en/media/interviews.php?gid=136515> (accessed April 1, 2010).

232 “Latvian MP Urges NATO to Set Criteria for Selling Equipment to Third Countries,” *Baltic News Service*, May 29, 2010.



a defensive alliance.”<sup>233</sup> In a perfect world, if NATO made it clear how it will respond in all situations, as well as what it deems acceptable and not, this would help to reassure Poland and the Baltics. Unfortunately, this is not possible. As Inis Claude noted, policy makers approach each case differently, not via the “doctrinaire application of a formula.”<sup>234</sup> Policy makers highly value flexibility and the ability to tailor a certain response to a situation. Also, reality is far less predictable than some politicians would like.

Some Baltic officials initially did not believe that such a sale was possible. In November 2009, Estonian Prime Minister Andrus Ansip commented that “the whole ship purchase issue has been created with the purpose of causing strife among NATO allies” and that for Russia to purchase a warship from France would be very shameful for Russia.<sup>235</sup> By purchasing warships from abroad, Russia would be admitting that it could no longer produce similar warships domestically, signaling a decline in ability and power. Thus the rumors of the sale could not be taken seriously in his opinion.

The idea that the sale was based on a Russian desire to cause discord was also shared by a Ukrainian analyst, Sergei Zgurets. His argument is that the *Mistral* is a poor fit for the Russian Navy, which has significant needs that are not fulfilled by an amphibious assault ship. He reasons that Russia is purchasing the *Mistral* to curry favor with France and split NATO as its ultimate goal.<sup>236</sup> Prime Minister Ansip too believed that the sale was implausible from a military perspective and that Moscow must have had another purpose, like trying to throw NATO off balance by inciting internal disagreement. While this may be a beneficial side effect for Russia, it is highly unlikely that causing discord was Moscow’s true purpose.

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233 Pawel Wronski, “Former NATO Ambassador Details Polish Position on New Strategic Concept, Russia,” *Gazeta Wyborcza Online*, October 27, 2010.

234 Inis L. Claude Jr., *Power and International Relations* (New York: Random House, 1962), 200–201.

235 “Estonia’s Ansip Sees “No Need” to Contact France Over Warship Sale to Russia,” *Baltic News Service*, November 30, 2009.

236 Sergei Zgurets, “Ukrainian Expert: Russia Buys Mistral to Split NATO,” *Zerkalo Nedeli* (2010).

Despite misgivings voiced by Estonian Foreign Minister Paet on the security impact in the Baltic regions<sup>237</sup> in general Estonian public statements were more muted than those from Latvia and Lithuania. This, however, does not mean that Estonia lacked concern about the sale. Rather, correspondence with officials at the Baltic Defense College has indicated that Estonia may be presenting its concerns to France directly in a confidential manner, eschewing the public debate. This may indicate that Estonia did not wish to take a dispute between NATO members public, a move that would serve Moscow's interest by sowing confusion in keeping NATO.

This attempt to keep the disagreement between NATO allies out of the diplomatic spotlight can also be seen in the U.S. response. Initially there was a great deal of public clamor, from a letter sent by six U.S. Senators to the French Ambassador to the introduction of a bill by U.S. Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, all condemning the sale.<sup>238</sup> U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates expressed concern over the *Mistral* sale and discussed the matter with his counterpart, French Defense Minister Hervé Morin during a meeting in February 2010. Gates' official comment was that "We had a good and thorough exchange of views on it. And I'll just leave it at that."<sup>239</sup> This terse statement seemed to indicate that Gates was unable to persuade the French to change their minds. The French Ambassador in his response to the Washington made it perfectly clear that France would support its NATO obligations, but that in Paris' view this sale would not contribute to insecurity in the Baltics. Besides, France would make its own decision. He also explicitly stated the fact that the *Mistral* was a support ship that could be used for

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237 *AFP (North European Service)*, "Estonia Highlights Concern Over France-Russia Warship Plan."

238 The letter was signed by Senate Minority Whip Jon Kyl, R-AZ, Senate Armed Services Committee ranking Republican John McCain, R-AZ, Tom Coburn, R-OK, Roger Wicker, R-MS, Sam Brownback, R-KS, and James Risch, R-ID. Letter is available at [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/images/091221\\_20091218\\_-\\_letter\\_to\\_French\\_Amb\\_RE\\_Mistral.pdf](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/images/091221_20091218_-_letter_to_French_Amb_RE_Mistral.pdf). The bill was HR 982, sponsored by Rep Ros-Lehtinen, then the highest ranking Republican in the House Foreign Affairs Committee: "Expressing the sense of the House of Representatives that France and other member states of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the European Union should decline to sell major weapons systems or offensive military equipment to the Russian Federation." It was referred to the House Foreign Affairs committee on 16 December 2009 and has remained in committee. <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bill.xpd?bill=hr111-982>.

239 Eleanor Beardsley, "French Plan to Sell Warship to Russia Fuels Concern," NPR, February 25, 2010. <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=124040339>.

humanitarian and national evacuation missions and so therefore the *Mistral* would not “represent a credible threat to the North Atlantic Alliance.”<sup>240</sup>

In an interview with *Gazeta.Ru* in October of 2010, Philip Gordon, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, stated that “weapon sales decisions are sovereign decisions for countries to make. And if a NATO ally like France is considering such decisions, we can have our views but ultimately it is a national decision.”<sup>241</sup> It could be inferred that the United States was reluctantly giving its acceptance of the sale. But it also may be true that U.S. objections were more forcefully put in confidential discussions with Morin.<sup>242</sup> This view has been repeated by various officials in Lithuania and Estonia—that the message behind the sale raises more concerns than the ship itself. This message was that some NATO members would be willing to ignore the security concerns of other allies to make a deal with a third party country. Defense Minister Morin defended the sale by commenting that one ship would “not make any difference with respect to Russian capabilities.”<sup>243</sup> Yet Morin admitted to Gates that the *Mistral* is a power projection warship.<sup>244</sup>

The Baltic countries do not believe that Russia would keep the *Mistral* out of the Baltic Sea in the future. As an example, Lithuanian Defense Minister Rasa Juknevičienė expressed her country’s view that the West cannot predict what Russia will or will not do. She commented that “while we do not consider Russia to be our enemy, we cannot rule out the possibility of the military equipment purchased [the *Mistral*], which is purely

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240 Excerpt from the Letter on 21 December 2009, by French Ambassador Pierre Vimont sent in response to the 18 December 2009 letter by Senate Minority Whip Jon Kyl, R-AZ, Senate Armed Services Committee ranking Republican John McCain, R-AZ, Tom Coburn, R-OK, Roger Wicker, R-MS, Sam Brownback, R-KS, and James Risch, R-ID. The letter can be viewed here [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/images/091222\\_Mistral\\_12-22-09.pdf](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/images/091222_Mistral_12-22-09.pdf).

241 “Assistant Secretary of State Gordon’s Interview with *Gazeta.Ru* in Moscow,” U.S. Department of State, <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/rls/rm/2010/150132.htm>.

242 AFP, ““Inquiétudes” Américaines Sur La Vente De Mistral à La Russie,” *Le Monde.Fr*, November 29, 2010.

243 Ibid.

244 “France to Build 2 Mistral-Class Ships with Russia,” *Agence France-Presse*, December 24, 2010.

offensive in nature, can be used predictably. We doubt the predictability of its use.”<sup>245</sup> In short, the Baltic states fear the enhanced maritime capability, given Russia’s unpredictability.

### C. EU COUNCIL/PARLIAMENT REACTIONS

The EU Council was approached with two written questions on the *Mistral* sale. In April 2010, a Polish MEP asked: given the EU Council Common Position of 8 December 2008,<sup>246</sup> would the Council address the *Mistral* sale? High Representative Ashton responded that export military sales were national decisions, and that the Council had no place to address such military sales.<sup>247</sup>

A follow-up question came in May 2010 from multiple MEPs, who asked whether the EU Council believed arms exports to non-EU members should be reviewed by the Council itself. Again, the Council responded that arms exports fell “within national competence” and that the Council had no intention of discussing the *Mistral* sale at any future summit meetings or meetings of the European Council.<sup>248</sup> Debates have also been held in the European Parliament; none of them conclusive. In Lithuanian MEP

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<sup>245</sup> “Lithuanian Defense Minister Doubts Predictability of *Mistral* use by Russia,” *Interfax*, January 17, 2011.

<sup>246</sup> The EU Code of Conduct on Arms Exports of 1998 was reworded in the Common Position defining common rules governing control of exports of military technology and equipment. According to the criteria set out in the Common Position, the Member States consider respect for human rights and for international humanitarian law on the part of the country of final destination and the need to maintain peace, security and stability in the region to be crucial. The Member States have undertaken to refuse to export weapons if there is a clear risk of the recipient using the military technology or equipment intended for export against another country or to assert by force a territorial claim. <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2008:335:0099:0103:En:PDF>.

<sup>247</sup> Answer given by High Representative/Vice President Ashton on behalf of the Commission: “Under the provisions of Common Position 2008/944/CFSP, the main responsibility and related concrete steps to implement controls of exports of military technology and equipment fall to the Member States. In particular, Article 4(2) of the Common Position specifies that ‘the decision to transfer or deny the transfer of any military technology or equipment shall remain at the national discretion of each Member State’. Consequently, it is not for the Commission to assess whether specific exports meet the criteria set out in the Common Position.” “Parliamentary Questions: E-2360/2010,” <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getAllAnswers.do?reference=E-2010-2360&language=EN2010>).

<sup>248</sup> “Parliamentary Questions: E-2359/2010,” European Parliament, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getAllAnswers.do?reference=E-2010-2359&language=EN> (accessed June 14, 2010).

Landsbergis' opinion, "Debates without a resolution are just talking,"<sup>249</sup> and in fact there have been no resolutions even proposed on the issue. During the main debate, held on 8 September 2010, numerous members of the European Parliament questioned the sale and its impact on European security. However, the representative from the EU Council<sup>250</sup> made it clear that there were no EU laws forbidding national arms exports. Again he repeated the position set forth by Lady Ashton in her earlier written response concerning arms sales.

A more recent question was again addressed to the EU Council on February 1, 2011, when an Estonian member of parliament asked the EU Council why it does not hold Russia accountable for Georgia cease fire agreements; does the arms sale fall into the category of selling arms to a country that does not respect human rights and does the EU council think the export will affect the security of the Baltic states or Poland, and if not, why? The only new questions asked were if the EU Council was aware of any guarantees against further export of the Russian built *Mistrals* as well as if the Council thought it was a good idea to have an EU country encourage Russia to invest in armaments. As of April 2011, the EU Council had not yet replied, but will likely restate its earlier comments on the sale.

Despite repeated requests to address the *Mistral* issue, the EU Council has shown that it does not wish to take a position. One reason may be that the EU Council is reluctant to antagonize Russia by labeling it as either a security threat or a country that allows violations of human rights. While this view is probably understood by Poland and the Baltic states as another example of the EU putting positive relations with Russia ahead of their concerns, there might be another explanation. If the EU Council got involved, other EU member states' arms sales might be at risk, such as German sales of submarines to Pakistan.<sup>251</sup> Moreover, France would not want the EU to have oversight regarding its national arms export decisions. The EU Council seems keen to avoid taking

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249 "Lithuanian MEP Calls for EU Parliament's Resolution on Mistral Sale to Russia," *Baltic News Service*, September 1, 2010.

250 Olivier Chastel stood in for the High Representative Lady Ashton.

251 Andrew Rettman, "French Warship Deal Opens Wound in EU and NATO," <http://euobserver.com/9/29459?print=1> (accessed November 2, 2010).

any sides or promoting any type of double standard, yet also does not wish to label Russia as a threat. This refusal to some observers represents the growing divide in Europe. MEP Landsbergis expressed this viewpoint: “When a member state stands against other member states’ opinions and natural security interest, questions on the European solidarity principle arise.”<sup>252</sup>

In any case, Poland and the Baltic states do not seem to have any real support from the EU Council for their concerns. Again, this lends support to the argument by the Eastern European countries that their concerns are often downplayed by the major Western European powers, especially when better relations with Russia are at stake.

#### **D. NATO RESPONSE BEFORE OFFICIAL ANNOUNCEMENT OF SALE**

To the Baltic states, the clearest example of how their concerns are ignored or belittled came from how the impending sale was announced. Both Lithuanian Defense Minister Juknevičienė and Latvian Foreign Minister Maris Riekstins announced that they would have preferred French consultations with NATO or EU members before proceeding with the sale, vice learning about the official sale through the media. Consultations would have “enhanced the spirit of solidarity” between NATO or EU members.<sup>253</sup> Instead the French *fait accompli* shows a lack of concern for what Estonia, Latvia or Lithuania think. Latvian MP Vaira Paegle also wanted NATO to develop a certain legal framework for individual contracts concerning military equipment sales between NATO member states and third countries.<sup>254</sup> This would have given assurance to the Baltic states that NATO as a whole took into account the consequences that arms sales could have for a member’s security. However, there have been no other comments of support of such a legal framework from the U.S., UK or any other arms exporting

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<sup>252</sup> *Baltic News Service*, “Lithuanian MEP Calls for EU Parliament’s Resolution on Mistral Sale to Russia.”

<sup>253</sup> Rettman, *French Warship Deal Opens Wound in EU and NATO*, 2.

<sup>254</sup> *Baltic News Service*, “Latvian MP Urges NATO to Set Criteria for Selling Equipment to Third Countries.”

NATO members. This is likely because such a legal framework may be viewed as too restrictive and intrusive to national policy or impinging on the sovereignty of NATO members.

Despite objections and informal protests from the Baltic states and Poland, NATO Secretary General Rasmussen has made it clear that he does not believe the *Mistral* sale has any threatening implications. He has also downplayed the notion that Russia is still a threat. In response to the military concerns of the Baltic states on the sale, Rasmussen has stated that he “trusted that the sale of this military equipment was in line with international convention and law.”<sup>255</sup> He also declared that he trusted that Russia would never use the warship against any NATO member or neighbor.<sup>256</sup> This seems a bold statement, one that could be seen as attempting to put restrictions on Russia. However, Russian Prime Minister Putin has been unequivocally clear that Russia reserved the right to “use it [the *Mistral*] where and when we consider it necessary.”<sup>257</sup> “We are buyers, you are sellers,”<sup>258</sup> he told French President Sarkozy, specifically implying that Russia would not make any promises or agree to any conditions. Based on Russian actions in recent years,<sup>259</sup> it could seem to some that Rasmussen maybe taking a gamble in attempting to predict Russian actions. The Baltic states are not looking for assumptions or beliefs from NATO; rather they want to see positive and continuous examples of the reinforcement of Article 5. Unfortunately, instead of discussions to address their concerns, they were told that the *Mistral* would specifically not be on the agenda of the 2010 Lisbon Summit.<sup>260</sup> Again this leads the Eastern European allies to conclude that NATO–Russia relations are more important than their concerns, and that NATO countries have been given a green light to assist in Russia's military modernization.

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255 “Russia is NATO's Partner, Not a Threat Or Advisor,” *Baltic News Service*, June 1, 2010.

256 Ibid.

257 Alla Lazareva, “Russia-France Arms Deal Raises Concerns for Neighbors,” *BBC News Online*, December 13, 2009.

258 Ibid.

259 Examples include natural gas cutoffs to Europe, statements on the Arctic, and the war in Georgia.

260 Vladimir Socor, “Russia Calls for Arms Embargo on Georgia After War's Second Anniversary,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 7, no. 157 (August 13, 2010).

Unfortunately, while some positive measures have been taken to reassure the Baltic countries, the *Mistral* sale provides yet another example of a broken promise from France to the Baltic nations concerning their security. In February 2010, French President Sarkozy sent the French Secretary of State for European Affairs, Pierre Lellouche, to the Baltic states. His mission was to reassure the Baltic countries that they had no reason to be concerned about the sale, arguing that “Russia can’t be placed under an embargo while pretending to treat it like a friend and partner.”<sup>261</sup> The reassurances were that the vessel that would be built and sold to the Russians would have “no military equipment.”<sup>262</sup> Secretary of State Lellouche went as far as to say that the French “will sell the ship without arms, as a civil ferry ship” and that there would be no transfer of military technology.<sup>263</sup> It was also widely assumed that the French would withhold sophisticated electronics from the Russians.<sup>264</sup> President Sarkozy even told President Medvedev that the ships would be sold without sensitive equipment.<sup>265</sup> It seemed quite clear that while the French were willing to sell a warship of the *Mistral* class, they would be selling primarily the hull and propulsion system, and not the electronics or armaments, and made this point very clear to their Russian buyers.

These statements and views contradicted Russian demands that, while at first were vague, began in early January 2010 to insist on technology transfers as part of the deal. Russian Prime Minister Putin stated that Russia would only be interested in a deal for the *Mistral* if “it is accompanied with a transfer of technologies.”<sup>266</sup> Admiral Vysotskiy has repeatedly stated that the deal would not be completed unless France offered technologies with the sale. He was quoted as saying that “[Technology

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261 Piotr Smolar, “Paris Tries to Reassure its Allies Worried by the Sale of Mistral-Class Vessels to Russians,” *Lemond.Fr*, March 10, 2010.

262 Ibid.

263 “Russia: France Will Sell Mistral to RF without Military Technologies and Arms,” *INFOX*, February 24, 2010.

264 Vladimir Socor, “Paris S'Excuse: French Officials Rationalize Naval Rearmament of Russia,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 7, no. 17 (January 26, 2010).

265 “Mistral Misfire: Ivan Won't Take Yes for an Answer,” *The Weekly Standard*, March 25, 2010, [www.weeklystandard.com/print/blogs/mistral-misfire](http://www.weeklystandard.com/print/blogs/mistral-misfire).

266 “Russia Needs Mistral Technology – Sechin,” *ITAR-TASS*, June 10, 2010.



transfer]...is the leading condition of the deal. If this does not happen, it makes no sense to undertake it [the entire *Mistral* sale].”<sup>267</sup> This type of statement seems to indicate that the ship and its capabilities themselves are not the overall objectives. Vysotskiy also has strongly highlighted the need to secure the onboard electronics of the *Mistral* as the Russian defense industry is incapable of producing the necessary components.<sup>268</sup> Everyone in authority in Russia, from Medvedev to Putin to Admiral Vysotskiy, has made it clear that the Russians are not going to purchase simply an empty hull.

As the Russian official government position was clear on their demands for technology, some analysts, such as Ruslan Pukhov of CAST, wrote that France would never sell the electronics the Russians wanted.<sup>269</sup> Another prevailing view was that France would placate its allies by selling the *Mistral* unfinished to Russia, but provide the desired equipment as an after-sale retrofit.<sup>270</sup> It seemed fairly certain in any case that the French would at least honor in some part their promises to the Baltic states.

It must have been disconcerting to the Baltic states in July 2010 when an unnamed Russian, who was part of the *Mistral* negotiating team, stated that the Russians were not buying an empty hull, but rather a ship with all the applicable navigation and technical equipment, “including the combat” components.<sup>271</sup> This was followed later by official statements from DCNS<sup>272</sup> that it was ready to deliver the *Mistral* to Russia without any restrictions. Pierre Legros, a DCNS manager, stated that “The *Mistral* could for example be provided with the ship’s command system, cabling and general

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267 Buntman and Yermolin, *Russia: CINC Vysotskiy Interviewed on Ekho Moscow Military Council Program*.

268 Roger N. McDermott, “French “Tin Cans” Or Technology Transfer? Vysotskiy on the Mistral,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 7, no. 144 (July 23, 2010).

269 Victor Baranets, “Why does Russia have to Buy Imported Armament? how can Foreign Military Hardward Influence Condition of our Army?” *Komsomolskaya Pravda* 48 (July 4, 2010).

270 Reuben F. Johnson, “Medvedev, Putin and the Mistral,” *The Weekly Standard*, [www.weeklystandard.com/print/blogs/medvedev-putin-and-mistral](http://www.weeklystandard.com/print/blogs/medvedev-putin-and-mistral) (accessed March 5, 2010).

271 “The RF Will Buy 'Mistral' with French Filling, but Weapons Will be its Own,” *RIA-Novosti*, July 5, 2010.

272 DCNS (Direction des Constructions Navales Service) is the French naval defense company which builds the Mistral.

communications”<sup>273</sup>—exactly what the French had previously promised not to sell with the *Mistral*. French Prime Minister Francois Fillon even said in December 2010 that there was no problem with the technology transfer and he fully expected the sale to go through.<sup>274</sup> This was in direct contrast to Lellouche’s earlier statements. Fillon explained the technology transfer as a non-issue, since the *Mistral* was simply “a transport and command vessel.”<sup>275</sup> The transport technology is negligible, but the command and control aspect is critical, as a potential use for the *Mistral* as discussed earlier will be that of a command and control ship. Giving the Russians improved command and control capabilities could boost their overall combat effectiveness. There is also the fact that the transfer of shipbuilding technology will aid the Russian shipbuilding industry to become more efficient.

The idea of selling the *Mistral* without weapons was more a symbolic point than anything else. Again, the *Mistral* only carries two very short-range point defense missile launchers, two 30-millimeter cannons and four machine guns.<sup>276</sup> The *Mistral* would require the presence of other warships to escort it in any type of combat situation. In comparison, Russian ship designs have always incorporated heavy armament on all their major warships, allowing a measure of self protection from a variety of threats. As mentioned earlier the largest amphibious warship in the Russian Navy, the *Ivan Rogov* class, carries two types of missile systems, both a short range and point defense system, two 76-millimeter cannons, one 122-millimeter cannon, two 40-barreled rocket launchers and four 30-millimeter cannons.<sup>277</sup> It can therefore be concluded that the French weapons were never a significant factor for the Russians and that France’s promise was an empty pledge. Rather the technologies inside the *Mistral* are what the Russians are after.

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273 “French Shipyard would Let Russia have Mistral 'without Restrictions' Or Weapons,” *AFP (Domestic Service)*, October 26, 2010.

274 Pierre Avril, “Fillon Confident about Mistral Sale to Moscow,” *LeFigaro.Fr*, December 10, 2010.

275 *Ibid.*

276 Manseck, *BPC “Mistral” Class*, 92.

277 Jane’s Fighting Ships, *Ivan Rogov (Yednorog) (Project 1174) Class II*.

Open source reporting has indicated that the Russians are getting the SENIT 9 combat system as well as advanced radars.<sup>278</sup> SENIT (*Système d'Exploitation Navale des Informations Tactiques* or Naval Operating System for Tactical Information) 9 is a combat management system that takes data from various on-board and off-board sensors and provides the operator a 3-D fusion of data.<sup>279</sup> It is not necessary to go into the classified details of what the system actually provides, but rather focus on the important point that the SENIT 9 system offered with the *Mistral* is the same system that is installed in the French BPCs and is a modified version (for the BPC mission) of what the French *Charles de Gaulle* aircraft carrier and the majority of French surface warships utilize. This is not a downgraded system designed only for export. The Russians will be getting top of the line command and control systems, one currently employed by a NATO country, and if some of the open source reports are correct, minus only the NATO classified codes.

There are also reports that the Russians will be getting the same radars, the Thales MRR-3 Next Generation radar and a Racal-Decca helicopter control radar, as the French BPCs.<sup>280</sup> The Russians have even gone as far as to ask for Link-11 and Link-16<sup>281</sup> systems to be installed<sup>282</sup>. These systems would allow the Russian *Mistrals* to exchange data link information with NATO navies. This would be far more than cooperation, rather closer to integration. One potential thought is that Russia is looking to increase interoperability with NATO navies, perhaps in peacekeeping operations or anti-piracy

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278 "Making of Mistral Deal," *Intelligence Online*, January 6, 2011.

279 "SENIT Combat Management System," Jane's Defence Equipment and Technology, <http://jdet.janes.com.libproxy.nps.edu/JDIC/JDET/documentView.do?docId=/content1/janesdata/yb/jc4i/jc4i0097.htm@current&pageSelected=allJanes&keyword=senit> 9&backPath=[http://jdet.janes.com/JDIC/JDET/search&Prod\\_Name=JC4I&activeNav=/JDIC/JDET](http://jdet.janes.com/JDIC/JDET/search&Prod_Name=JC4I&activeNav=/JDIC/JDET)

280 *Intelligence Online*, "Making of Mistral Deal."

281 "Link 16 provides real-time, jam-resistant secure transfer of combat data, voice and relative navigation information between widely dispersed battle elements. Participants gain situational awareness by exchanging digital data over a common communication link that is continuously and automatically updated in real time, reducing the chance of fratricide, duplicate assignments or missed targets. Each participant in the communication link is able to electronically see the battle space, including assigned targets or threats." - . Link 11 is an older data link that is primarily used by surface forces but is not as robust, secure or capable as Link 16. - John Pike, "Tactical Digital Information Links (TADIL)," Federation of American Scientists, <http://www.fas.org/irp/program/disseminate/tadil.htm>.

282 Jean Guisnel, "Sarkozy Will Go to Saint Nazaire for Signing of Mistral Contract," *Le Point.Fr*, January 24, 2011.

operations. Another viewpoint is that Russia is simply trying to acquire modern data link systems to modernize its forces. The problem in general is that NATO Link 11/16 systems are not compatible with the current data link systems aboard Russian warships. So it makes little tactical sense to have four warships operating one data link system, and the rest of the navy on another system. These separate data link systems would also defeat the stated intentions about using a *Mistral* as a command and control ship. To be effective, or even integrated into Russian naval operations, the Russian *Mistrals* will have to be outfitted with Russian data link and communication systems. Besides looking to reverse engineer the data link systems, one of the only other reasons that makes some sense is possibly the Russians are interested in increasing interoperability with NATO, at least in principle.

For now, France has demurred on the data links, claiming all NATO allies would have to agree. The U.S. would also be able to block the transfer as much of the technology for Link 11 and 16 initially came from the United States. Still, it seems the Russians are actively pushing for as much technology as they can get. The actual capabilities are not the important issue, it is rather the fact that the Russians will not be just getting empty hulls, but rather electronic equipment that is almost equivalent to what is on NATO warships.

The SENIT 9 systems are reportedly not to be sold with a production license so Russia would be unable to produce their own domestic version legally. Still four vessels with an advanced command and control capability, fusing variety of sensors' information will bring a new capability to the Russian Navy, if it can be properly integrated with existing Russian systems on other warships.

As some NATO allies believe that France has already reneged on one promise, those allies will continue to fear that Russia will acquire a significant technological upgrade during the next ten years of cooperation between France and Russia in building these warships.

## E. LISBON SUMMIT RESULTS

The Eastern European allies hoped that the 2010 NATO Lisbon Summit would underline/strengthen NATO's commitment to collective defense. The general reaction immediately following the summit was one of cautious optimism by most countries. To the relief of the Baltic states and Poland, the new Strategic Concept specifically confirmed that NATO's core task is territorial defense and allied solidarity in the event of an attack. The new Strategic Concept called for NATO "to carry out the necessary training, exercises, contingency planning and information exchange for assuring our defence."<sup>283</sup>

In spite of some positive developments for reassurance, there have been some misgivings or concerns that not enough has been done. While it has been acknowledged that NATO defense plans have been drafted for Poland and the Baltic states, some in those countries would have liked to see a statement of their formal approval in the final summit documents or in another official public forum vice out in the open public.<sup>284</sup>

Another concern that was raised by a Czech analyst was how the defense budget cuts of the European NATO nations would potentially affect any security pledges. The UK is looking at trimming 30,000 soldiers and 25% of its defense budget over the next four years, while France is cutting 2–5 billion euros from their defense budget as Germany cuts 40,000 soldiers.<sup>285</sup> With cuts such as these, will the Western European allies be able to come to the defense of the Baltic states, or would that task, should it arise, fall upon the United States? This question is related to the underlying fear that, despite promises, the Western European allies might find some excuse or reason not to aid in the defense of the Eastern European members.

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283 "Active Engagement, Modern Defence Strategic Concept for the Defence and Security of the Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation Adopted by Heads of State and Government in Lisbon," NATO, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official\\_texts\\_68580.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_68580.htm) (accessed November 19, 2010).

284 Rick Rozoff, "NATO Develops Plans for Military Confrontation with Russia in Baltic," *Inteldaily.com*, <http://inteldaily.com/2010/12/nato-develops-plans-for-military-confrontation-with-russia-in-baltic/> (accessed December 11, 2010).

285 "EUROPEAN UNION: Defence Cuts Raise Security Questions," *OxResearch Daily Brief Service* (August 10, 2010), 1.

A Polish political analyst, Grzegorz Kostrzewa-Zorbas, made an interesting point about what NATO should have done to reassure Poland and the Baltic States that defensive aid would come their way in a conflict. His point was that, in regard to Article 5, NATO should specify precisely that members will assist each other with military means, and not just humanitarian aid.<sup>286</sup> While such a specific and detailed statement by NATO seems extremely unlikely to ever be agreed upon by all members, this suggestion does reveal Polish fears that some NATO allies might "fulfill" their Article 5 commitments by supplying something other than true military support.

On the other hand, Sven Mikser of the Estonian Foreign Affairs Committee, indicated that he was satisfied that the NATO Strategic Concept protected Estonia. Mikser noted that the issue of defense plans as well as exercises was specifically addressed in the Strategic Concept.<sup>287</sup> These differences of opinion generally reflect the "wait and see" attitude of the eastern European allies. Some are looking at positive statements from the Lisbon Summit while others continue to raise questions about the new Strategic Concept and related NATO policies and activities.

Specifically with respect to the *Mistral*, there was not much discussion in open sources following the summit (perhaps because the *Mistral* was specifically off the summit agenda<sup>288</sup>). There was also no reference to any arms sales or to developing any legal conditions responding to member nation concerns over arms sales. The only specific comments on the *Mistral* came from the new Latvian Defense Minister Artis Pabriks whose statements were in direct contrast to earlier fears expressed by the Latvian Defense Ministry. Defense Minister Pabriks noted that Latvia has resolved the majority of its concerns with France over the *Mistral*. Latvia's main concern was the lack of communication and consultations behind the sale. Pabriks stated: "I do not think that there would be any point in our returning to this issue of the *Mistral* because I think we can resolve all of our concerns within NATO, taking our new strategic concept into

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286 Piotr Semka, "NATO Half Way," *Rp.Pl*, November 23, 2010.

287 Jurgen Tamme, "Valismaaraja: Changing NATO Protects Estonia's Interests," *Postimees.Ee*, November 21, 2010.

288 Socor, *Russia Calls for Arms Embargo on Georgia After War's Second Anniversary*.

account.”<sup>289</sup> The fact that Latvia is publicly content with no longer challenging the *Mistral* sale seems to indicate an acceptance that the sale would proceed despite any security misgivings it may have. Latvia may also be trying to present a unified front to Russia, placing its trust in the Article 5 reassurances and its NATO members instead of reacting to a Russian action.

## F. NATO REACTIONS POST FORMAL ANNOUNCEMENT

There was little official NATO reaction concerning either the official announcement on 24 December 2010, or the signing of an inter-government agreement on January 25 for the construction of four *Mistrals* for the Russian Navy.<sup>290</sup> Rather NATO Secretary Rasmussen reiterated the official NATO view point in his January monthly press conference that the sale was a “bilateral arrangement” between Russia and France. He went on to state that NATO took “for granted that Russia will not in any way use this military equipment against any NATO ally or neighbor.”<sup>291</sup> Again this seems to fall into the category of wishful thinking. Russia has clearly rejected any notion of restrictions on the placement or use of its *Mistrals*. This viewpoint can also be considered in the framework of the NATO-Russia reset idea, where improving relations with Russia is very important. The Russians have not given any indications that they plan on using these warships in a threatening way. In fact they have specifically touted the non combat abilities of the *Mistrals* publicly for possible Russian missions. As was mentioned earlier, the initial Russian reports of basing the *Mistrals* in the Kuril Islands is also the least threatening or provocative to NATO and other European countries. The point is though, a country’s stated intentions and capabilities are two different things. Now that Russia will be gaining a capability, NATO cannot simply ignore it. The fact that the capability is being publicly glossed over or minimized underlines the concerns of

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289 Didzis Melkis, “Latvian Defense Minister Discusses State of Military, Relations with NATO,” *Diena*, November 25, 2010.

290 Yuriy Gavrilov, “Together, Russia and France Will Build Modern Helicopter Carriers,” *Rossiyskaya Gazeta Online*, January 26, 2011.

291 Anders Fogh Rasmussen, “Secretary General's Monthly Press Conference, 24 January 2011,” [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions\\_69914.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions_69914.htm).

some of the Baltic states. For NATO to remain credible, even if the chances are extremely remote, updates to plans accounting for new capabilities should be undertaken.

#### **G. BALTIC REACTIONS POST-OFFICIAL ANNOUNCEMENT**

After the official agreement announcements, each Baltic country, as well as Sweden and Norway reacted in its own way. Lithuania came out with the loudest public disapproval of the sale, while Latvia made few comments and Estonia has been quiet. In Lithuania and Latvia however, various levels of concern have been voiced by different government officials.

In Lithuania, Defense Minister Rasa Juknevičienė called France's decision "a big mistake."<sup>292</sup> She went on to reiterate the Lithuanian viewpoint that it was not about the military capability but rather the principle and precedent of the sale. Downplaying the severity of the sale's impact was the Lithuanian Prime Minister, Andrius Kubilius. An official government spokesperson for the prime minister stated that "possible concerns over the sale of such weaponry are soothed by the news that it can no longer be produced in Lithuania's neighborhood."<sup>293</sup> This seems to indicate that Kubilius is more reassured by the fact that Russia evidently no longer has the capability to build its own amphibious assault warships and has to buy them abroad than by the actual warships themselves. This viewpoint conveniently overlooks the fact that Russia is planning on building two *Mistrals* in a modernized shipyard outside St. Petersburg. While the Russians are not planning to build *Mistrals* in the Kaliningrad region, St. Petersburg is only approximately 480 nautical miles away via the Baltic. This official government statement oversimplifying the facts seems to indicate at least some desire to minimize and dismiss further discussion of the sale. This line of reasoning is further expressed by the President

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292 "Mistral Sale to Russia is Big Mistake," *Baltic News Service*, December 27, 2010.

293 "Lithuania Questions France-Russia Warship Deal," *AFP (North European Service)*, January 25, 2011.



of Lithuania, Dalia Grybauskaite, who has emphasized that Lithuania's security is guaranteed by NATO which has even drawn up special defense plans for it, so therefore there is no need to worry.<sup>294</sup>

The Latvian view is consistent with their statements after the Lisbon Summit. Latvian Defense Minister Artis Pabriks put forth a softer line than his Lithuanian counterpart. While he criticized France for ignoring the viewpoint of the Baltic states, he did not think the sale would directly affect Latvia's security as "the sale has no dramatic effect on either the balances of forces in the region or NATO strategy in the Baltic states".<sup>295</sup> In a continuing theme, Latvia Foreign Minister Girts Valdis Kristovskis minimized any threat and instead focused on the positive aspect of the sale, that because Russia was buying equipment from NATO, it "must lack technology, it is weaker than we [NATO] have been thinking."<sup>296</sup> In addition, he again touted the familiar statement that Russia has said it would not place these warships in the Baltic Sea, so there is no threat. Again, this statement conveniently overlooks the point that the Russian *Mistrals* can move. While the actual military capability is not the issue, the interesting point is how Latvia has downplayed the threat. One theory was that Latvia was avoiding publicly criticizing Russia in return for more favorable gas prices.<sup>297</sup> This seems unlikely since Russia does not need Latvian goodwill for the sale. Rather this may just be part of Russia's desire to ensure continuing contracts with energy dependant states and forestall them from looking elsewhere. The Latvian response could indicate a reluctance to speak out as one of the smaller members of NATO, as their viewpoint does not carry as much weight as the larger NATO members (although since NATO works on the consensus principle, it still has influence on official NATO actions). However, a viewpoint

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294 "In Context of Mistral Sale, Presidential Representative Highlights NATO Guarantees to Lithuania's Security," *ELTA*, January 19, 2011.

295 "Latvian Defmin Sees no Threat in France's Plan to Sell Warships to Russia," *Baltic News Service*, December 28, 2010.

296 "Deal with Mistral Warships shows Russia's Weakness in Military Equipment - Latvian Formin," *Baltic News Service*, January 26, 2011.

297 In December 2010 a 15% discount in gas prices was announced by Gazprom and Latvijas Gaze during the Latvia President's visit to Moscow. Pauls Raudseps, "Enchanted by Moscow," *Ir*, January 6, 2011.

currently held in Latvia is best expressed by a daily newspaper there asking if Latvia's role "is that of a film extra who has no lines to recite?"<sup>298</sup>

Estonia has remained quiet since 2009. Estonia officials also declined to comment on the sale after the January 25 announcement.<sup>299</sup> One viewpoint is that if the Russians were to ever use or threaten to use *Mistrals* in the Baltic, it is more than simply a concern for Estonia, but rather all the other border states with Article 5 security guarantees. The security implications need to be analyzed between multiple countries. As a member of the Baltic Defense College has mentioned, if Estonia were to voice its concerns alone, it could prove to be counterproductive as one of the smallest members of NATO. The Estonian Ministry of Defense indicated they have accepted official explanations from French Secretary of State for European Affairs Pierre Lellouche that no NATO member interests will be damaged by the sale.<sup>300</sup> There have been concerns voiced about Russian intentions, but fewer direct attacks on the French in contrast to Lithuania. One of the few direct reactions to the sale has been the call by the Commander-in-Chief of the Estonia Defense Forces Ants Laaneots, that to ensure Estonian national security, Estonia should begin to build up a coast guard.<sup>301</sup> Still this is a defensive reaction, and not one that would be unsettling to other NATO allies. In fact, most member countries would welcome the additional capability of a member nation. In short Estonia has eschewed the public debate over the *Mistral*, instead watching carefully the ongoing negotiations of price and basing between France and Russia, and avoiding contributing to any internal NATO discord.

France has attempted to respond to some of the criticisms of the sale once it was announced. In March 2011, Francois Laumonier, the French Ambassador to Lithuania explained again that France did not see *Mistral* sales as threatening Lithuanian security.<sup>302</sup> He went on to reiterate the French position that integrating Russia into

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298 Uldis Smits, "No Lines to Recite," *Latvijas Avize, Riga* January 28, 2011.

299 *AFP (North European Service)*, "Lithuania Questions France-Russia Warship Deal."

300 Karl Haljasmets, "French Warships in Russia's Navy," *The Baltic Times*, March 9, 2011.

301 *Ibid.*

302 "French Ambassador to Vilnius: Mistral Sales to Russia Reflects Aim to Improve France's Economic Situation," *Baltic News Service*, March 7, 2011.

European affairs would provide more security for all European nations.<sup>303</sup> These statements likely did not draw as much attention as his further comments on the reason behind the sale. Ambassador Laumonier stated

Mistral sales reflect the political will of France to improve its economic situation by way of an economic deal. The deal means 5 million hours of work hours to our employees – this is four years of work for a thousand people.<sup>304</sup>

This statement alone voiced the fear of Lithuania and other smaller members, that France would discard a NATO allies concern in light of providing for its own economic well being, and do so openly. While this reasoning cannot be completely faulted, it does lessen the trust value that Lithuania and other smaller NATO allies have in some of the large NATO members. It also reconfirms the notion for smaller members that their opinions are not taken into account.

Ambassador Laumonier also rejected the notion about any internal NATO criticism of the plan, specifically stating in addition that “we [France] do not think our actions lacked transparency.”<sup>305</sup> This is in direct contrast to early February 2010, when the Defense Ministers of both Latvia and Lithuania publicly decried the fact that they learned about the sale through the media.<sup>306</sup> The fact that both countries specifically brought up the fact they were not consulted, and the lack of consultation was one of their issues with the sale, seems to indicate that the latest French statements are again trying to downplay the entire issue. The sweeping under the rug, again leads to further mistrust in the Baltic regions.

Swedish and Norwegian official statements are also interesting. Norway has taken the position that it will not comment on “unsubstantiated rumors about Russia’s disposal of its own defense” in response to inquiries about the potential basing of

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303 “French Ambassador to Vilnius: Mistral Sales to Russia Reflects Aim to Improve France’s Economic Situation,” *Baltic News Service*, March 7, 2011.

304 *Baltic News Service*, “French Ambassador to Vilnius: Mistral Sales to Russia Reflects Aim to Improve France’s Economic Situation.”

305. Ibid.

306 Andrew Rettman, “Latvia and Lithuania Call for Tighter EU Rules on Arm Sales,” *Euobserver.Com*, February 25, 2010.

*Mistrals* in either the Baltic Sea or Russia's Northern Fleet, based at Severomorsk.<sup>307</sup> Sweden has taken the viewpoint that the effects of the *Mistrals* on the security of the Baltic Sea need to be evaluated and discussed.<sup>308</sup> Reports surfaced in the fall of 2010 that the defense minister of the Baltic nations and Scandinavian ones were interested in setting up discussions on common security matters in the Baltic.<sup>309</sup> After the sale was announced, the Lithuanian Parliament speaker Ireana Degutiene proposed for Nordic and Baltic countries to "jointly discuss urgent security issues, such as the sale of French *Mistral* warships to Russia, on high level and on the regular bases."<sup>310</sup> This idea has found support in other countries as well, specifically Sweden via the Swedish Speaker of Parliament Per Westerberg.

On February 8, 2011, the Estonian and Swedish Defense Ministers signed a framework agreement on defense cooperation, with emphasis on military training.<sup>311</sup> Lithuania is also interested in joining the EU Nordic Battle group<sup>312</sup>, which Estonia is a part of. A strengthened Nordic-Baltic security policy agreement covering a wide range of missions is potentially to be signed in April or May 2011.<sup>313</sup> Great Britain is also rumored to be interested in this Nordic-Baltic Agreement.<sup>314</sup> The fact that some of the Baltic nations are turning to bilateral security agreements with the Nordic states is indicative that they do not intend to rely solely on NATO for their protection or assistance.

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307 Thomas Nilsen, "Norway: No Comment, Sweden: Effects must be Discussed," *BarentsObserver.Com* (January 18, 2011).

308 Nilsen, "Norway: No Comment, Sweden: Effects must be Discussed."

309 Aivars Ozolins, "Latvian Commentary Analyzes Results of Recent NATO Summit for Latvia," *Ir*, December 10, 2010.

310 "Parliament Speaker Calls for Common Nordic-Baltic Response to *Mistral* Sale to Russia," *The Lithuania Tribune*.

311 Antoni Rybczynski, "No Longer Counting on Poland," *Gazeta Polska*, March 11, 2011.

312 The EU-Nordic Battle group is one of the 18 EU battle groups. The following countries provide troops: Norway, Sweden, Finland, Ireland and Estonia.

313 *Ibid.*

314 *Ibid.*

## H. CONCLUSION

Since the potential sale of the *Mistral* first became public in late 2009, the statements from various NATO allies have provided an insight as to the anxieties in certain member countries. The sale has reinforced the impression in the Baltic States and Poland that major NATO countries continue to ignore their security concerns, that providing Russia with a more modern capability for aggression were either ignored or kept quiet in the interest of alliance unity. The fact that France did not consult with any allies was a damaging blow to the confidence of the Baltic states and Poland. It implied that they are still second-class member states, whose inputs do not matter. The fact that France did not consult with other allies was evidently not a consolation to Poland and the Baltic States.

If the Baltic States truly felt their concerns would be fairly heard and respected in NATO councils, there would be less chance that the emerging Baltic-Scandinavian defense consultations could potentially weaken NATO.

Instead, NATO and France have reacted to Baltic and Polish warnings about Russian aggressiveness by dismissing them. This merely reaffirms the continuing Polish viewpoint that NATO Allies often proclaim Polish concerns as being “hysterical or historical.” Eastern European countries are not opposed to better NATO-Russia relations; they are just concerned that better relations might be pursued at their expense.

While the 2010 NATO Strategic Concept said the right things, for the affected nations, words are not enough. Defense plans and pledges to honor Article 5 commitments are a good start, but actions speak louder than words. Exercises are good examples of providing reassurance but the trust and confidence gained by the positive measures may be easily undone by events that minimize or even just seem to minimize Eastern European concerns, such as the *Mistral* sale. When promises by France to the Baltic states are broken, these states see proof that they do not count. France’s counter argument has always been that they will support NATO’s Article 5 guarantees.

Furthermore, France has pointed to its direct contribution to the Baltic states security, by flying French air force air patrols over Baltic territory<sup>315</sup> as proof that it would not abandon its treaty commitments.

The other problem is that for the Baltic states the *Mistral* sale is merely the first of many future arm sales between NATO countries and Russia. In 2010, the Russian Defense Ministry conducted preliminary negotiations with one of Germany's largest producers of military equipment, Rheinmetall. Russia inquired not only about possibility of buying the license to produce armored plates, but also signed a contract by which Rheinmetall will establish a tank training center in Russia as well as establish a joint enterprise for the repair, refurbishing, and modernization of armaments and military vehicles.<sup>316</sup> Besides the *Mistral*, France is also in talks to provide Russia with advanced individual battle kits for soldiers as well as Safran-Sagem avionics for Russian fighter planes.<sup>317</sup> Lastly, the Italian firm of Iveco will be producing Lynx light multi-purpose vehicles in cooperation with Russia.<sup>318</sup> These recent arm sales are what the smaller NATO members are concerned about. In the western countries' rush to provide jobs for their populations, the Baltic states see these arms sales and assistance as proof that their concerns are being brushed aside.

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315 "French Fighters Start Baltic Air Police Mission," *RIA-Novosti*, January 4, 2010.

316 Vladimir Socor, "Made in Germany for Russia's Army," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 8, no. 31 (February 14, 2011).

317 Ibid.

318 Ibid.

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## IV. CONCLUSION

### A. LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE POTENTIAL SALE

NATO must continue to act in solidarity to address the security concerns of Poland and the Baltic States. NATO must also show that it understands these countries' concerns, and not simply dismiss them. If NATO fails in this regard, the Baltic States and Poland may begin to wonder what the alliance truly brings to the table for them. To ensure their security, smaller member states may look toward bi-lateral relations for security guarantees with other nations. Even if the countries are not the most powerful militarily, a relationship with another country that has the same threat perspective is an important consideration. As Tomas Valasek stated, bilateral security relationships could “threaten to divide NATO and weaken the security of the rest of the alliance.”<sup>319</sup> This is the danger that may arise if NATO does not properly react.

Of course, it is also important to look at both sides of the argument. NATO has publicly affirmed multiple times the premise of its Article 5 guarantee. The Baltic nations cannot continually insist on being abandoned by their NATO allies when they themselves do not actively contribute to their own defense. As Edward Lucas has pointed out, in terms of percent of GDP spent on defense<sup>320</sup>, Estonia will outspend both Lithuania and Latvia under current projections.<sup>321</sup> Various news agencies have reported on the fact that there do exist NATO defense plans for the Baltic states. So the Baltic states are far from abandoned.

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319 “NATO, Russia and European Security,” *EurActiv* December 2009. <http://www.Euractiv.Com>.

320 Based on the NATO definition of defense expenditures as a percentage of GDP, for 2010, Estonia ranks seventh with 1.8% of its GDP spent on defense while Latvia and Lithuania rank 23 and 24 out of 25 NATO allies, spending 1% and 0.9% on defense respectfully. – *Financial and Economic Data Relating to NATO Defence* (Brussels, Belgium: NATO Press Release, [2011]). [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news\\_71296.htm?mode=pressrelease](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_71296.htm?mode=pressrelease).

321 “If Lithuania Fails to Realize to Protect itself, it Will be Hard to Convince its Partners of Doing that - Lucas,” *ELTA*, January 14, 2011.



There is a fine line between taking every member state's considerations into account and engaging in positive relations with Russia. Both sides have to compromise. The one major lesson for NATO from the *Mistral* sale is that consultations have to be much more thorough and complete. Despite successful exercises and proclamations, all it takes to have members actively question each other's motives is for communication to break down, which leads to suspicion. This is especially for those countries that have a long, dark history with Russia.

As already mentioned, in March 2011, reports began surfacing from Russia and France that the *Mistral* contract negotiations were at an impasse, which were soon dismissed by official Russian sources. It seems the two sides are disagreeing over the final price and levels of technology transfer. Some sources have indicated that the disagreement may be over the price tag of such electronic command and control systems such as the SENIT 9 and SIC-21 combat information systems.<sup>322</sup> Other sources have indicated that the French are willing to sell the SENIT 9 system, but without a license for Russia to produce domestic versions, and have refused outright to sell the SIC-21 combat management system.<sup>323</sup>

On April 25, 2011, the French Ambassador to Russia, Jean de Gliniasty mentioned that there were no political obstacles to the sale, but rather negotiations over price always take time. He did mention that most technologies were unclassified, yet some technologies "those of the ship's filling" were classified and could not be transferred without NATO's consent.<sup>324</sup> He did not specify, however, which systems he was referring to. It seems as if either the French have reneged on some of their promises or that the Russians never specified exactly what systems they were after. Perhaps internal NATO pressure caused the French to reconsider what they were willing to offer. One important point that has to be kept in context is that the January 25, 2010 agreement

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322 "В Минобороны опровергли данные СМИ о "пустых коробках" за миллиард вместо *Mistral*," Newsru.com, <http://newsru.com/russia/13apr2011/fullco.html> (accessed April 13, 2011).

323 "Стартуют решающие переговоры о закупке Россией «Мистралей»,"" *Vzglyad.Ru*, April 20, 2011. *В Минобороны опровергли данные СМИ о "пустых коробках" за миллиард вместо *Mistral**

324 "Франция: На часть технологий «Мистраля» нужно разрешение НАТО," *Vzglyad.Ru*, April 25, 2011.

between Russia and France was not a contract for four warships, but rather an intergovernmental agreement agreeing to the principle of a sale. The final price and sales contract still has yet to be signed as of April 2011. And reports from Russian sources seem to indicate the negotiation process could take months or even drag into next year due to the complexity of such a contract.<sup>325</sup>

Regardless of the problems mentioned above it is still likely the sale will proceed. This delay in the negotiating process provides some insight into some of the true reasons behind the sale. The fact that the Russians are haggling over the levels of technology transfer indicates that their priority is not simply getting an amphibious warship that Russia can outfit with its own systems. This whole process shows how there was never a genuine capability assessment done on what the Russian Navy needs. Instead, the *Mistral* may have likely been a top down decision, to buy these warships. Pavel Baev of the International Peace Research Institute in Oslo argues that the Russian Navy never really wanted the *Mistrals* but was not about to turn down new ships.<sup>326</sup> Once the Russian Navy was informed it was getting these ships, it would make no sense to protest the acquisition strongly, but now the navy had to find missions for the *Mistrals* to do.

There is also the point that when the interest in *Mistrals* was announced, at first Russia was going to enter directly into negotiations with France for finalizing the sale. Since the Russian Defense Ministry went after a specific vessel and manufacture, it seems as if Russia was not interested in finding truly the best platform that would satisfy the capability it desired. Rather by choosing the *Mistral* first, now the Russian Navy has to build missions to fit the *Mistral's* capabilities, not the normal way of choosing a platform to fill a mission.

Critics of the current Russian Navy shipbuilding plans, such as Konstantin Valentinovich Sivkov, the First Vice President of the Russian Academy of Geopolitical Problems, make the point that the *Mistrals* “will do nothing at all for missions facing the

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<sup>325</sup> “Preparation of Contract on Mistral Ships may Take Years - Source,” *Interfax-AVN Online*, April 11, 2011.

<sup>326</sup> Mikhail Baklanov, Dmitri Mungals and Catherine Tropic, “Военная стратегия есть только до выборов,” BFM.ru, <http://www.bfm.ru/articles/2011/04/21/voennaja-strategija-est-tolko-do-vyborov.html#text> (accessed April 25, 2011).

Navy, [and] is completely extraneous.”<sup>327</sup> While the *Mistral* can fill a multitude of roles, none of the roles it will fill is a critical need of the Russian Navy currently. Instead of filling true combat roles, the Russian Navy has possibly viewed the *Mistral* as a center piece for limited projection of power over the next decade or so. In addition to the possible gain of new technology, the addition of four new ships fit right into the Russian Navy’s plan of rapidly acquiring new warships to replace its rapidly decaying fleet. The emphasis on technology, both the modern command and control systems and the shipbuilding technologies indicate that is not the capability that is the key desire of the Russians. One other indication of the selection of a *Mistral* style ship is an emphasis on a multi-mission ship vice a warship built for a specific purpose. A multi-mission ship, specifically a helicopter carrier, also gives Russia a reason to reinvest in its domestic helicopter industry. There is no doubt again though, that the Russians can find suitable missions for the *Mistrals*.

There is a lot hinging on the *Mistral* sale politically for both sides, and because France is the only country willing to go as far as it has with technology transfer, the Russians are not going to look elsewhere for ships. And despite statements from Sevmash that they can build a *Mistral* themselves, there are no shipyards in Russian that can build a *Mistral* in a modular format as the French have. In addition, the Sevmash Shipyard has too many current orders to add a *Mistral* order to its workload.<sup>328</sup>

It is still likely that despite the issues with the negotiations in April 2011, the sale will be finalized between Russia and France. What remains to be seen are the final details of the sale, including the final price of the contract and what technologies get licensed and transferred. For Russia, the *Mistral* represents the best possible avenue to modernizing multiple facets of its navy as well as rapidly adding warships to its fleet rolls. The Russian Navy will undoubtedly find roles for the *Mistrals* to fill, however the ships were not purchased to fill a glaring capability gap. The Russian *Mistrals* are part of the means to the end (of Russian Naval modernization), not the end themselves.

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327 Konstantin Kobayakov, “an Imbalance Will Appear in the Navy’: An Expert Evaluated the Concept of Building the Russian Navy,” *Vzгляд Online*, April 15, 2011.

328 “Mistral Will be Returned in St. Petersburg,” *Kommersant*, <http://navalshow.ru/eng/news/id/354/> (accessed August 15, 2010).

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